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OVERSHADOWED

BY EUGENE LÖHRKE

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FOR NORMA AND HERSCHEL BRICKELL
IN GRATEFUL FRIENDSHIP

It is when we try to grapple with another man's intimate need that we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the warmth of the sun. It is as if loneliness were a hard and absolute condition of existence; the envelope of flesh and blood on which our eyes are fixed melts before the outstretched hand, and there remains only the capricious, unconsolable, and elusive spirit that no eye can follow, no hand can grasp.

—*Joseph Conrad in* LORD JIM

PART I

THE QUIET PLACE

I

HIS MOTHER WAS A WIDOW, AND SHE HAD sent her only boy and greatest treasure in life to the war with a blessing that was to have shone around his head like a halo.

It was a poetic head, with a face that could at times be soulful, so the idea is not altogether as incongruous as it sounds. At college he had been "kidded a good deal," to use his own expression, for being a mother's boy. But the fellows there, of course, could never understand what a wonderful being his mother was, nor how happily and quietly they had lived together, in a huge and greying mansion, cut off from the world, on the outskirts of a rural town.

He was extremely young and good looking, and wore his uniform with a slight droop about the shoulders. His smile was charming and confident, but there was a certain shyness in the quick, defensive gestures of his thin and nervous hands. He had spent the whole of his boyhood with his mother in the twilight retirement of their home. It was an old home, a dignified home, lost in the seclusion of its oaks. From without it spoke of better days; from within its dim vistas of shabby drawing rooms, its heavy oil portraits, and the silent gloom of its upper regions, whispered to you of ancestors, of memories and of ghosts.

It was closed to the outer world by two grey gateposts, leaning inward, with a chain stretched in between.

Beyond lay a driveway, and overhead the thick foliage of birches and horse-chestnuts joined, overlapping like the solid masonry of a tunnel. The dark leaf masses, unstirred by any wind, soaked up the sunlight, transmuting it to an inessential twilight, that clung to trunks and creepers like a grey mist.

Then the twilight was broken. The blue shimmer of the sky appeared in fragments, like bits of

broken china, where the straight pines thrust their way through the heavy roofing. A tall fence, with the paint fallen in flakes, set off a weed grown plot, and the weather-rounded shoulders and worn facings of the headstones pronounced a desolate triumph of human solidarity over fate.

In the open space beyond, the hot summer sunlight fell in a deluge. Clumps of shrubbery marched dejectedly across the barren reaches of an uncut lawn. Two immense oaks spread out arms of darkness again, and the great house beyond lay in their shadows as in a shroud. There appeared the red brick of the foundations, a window or two, like a solemn eye, segments of tall grey pillars, like fragments of a classic ruin, a chimney with a lightning rod dangling from it, an immense expanse of roof. Once across the threshold, and the hands of the past closed on the imagination. A shadowy hallway gave on the twilight vastness of long drawing rooms, with an air of dust and decay about them. Walnut furniture of a bygone era gleamed dully. A heavy box-like piano, like a grey sarcophagus perched on carved wooden legs, stood beside a tall fireplace of red and white marble, yawning half way to the ceiling. The bare, polished floor caught in pallid pools the thin light that sifted in through

breaks in the embracing foliage, and shadowed faintly the shapes of chairs with slender legs, brittle and formal looking tables, a cabinet with glass doors, with a delicate glow of fragile china behind them. The swept surface of things gave off a faint odour, as of decay; the creak of a floorboard in the regions above came like a whisper in a tomb. The unstirring dark leaves pressed in against the windows like black marble clusters, and a double row of portraits done awkwardly in flat, faded oils, stared you heavily, insistently, into a world of forgotten things.

Here as a child, he had played by himself. There had been very little to trouble him; an occasional shadow, perhaps, across the threshold of dreams and fantasies. The joy of life was a dream, the dread of life a nightmare. From his tenth to his fourteenth year, he had struggled with these nightmares. His own voice, hoarse and strange, like the voice of another presence within him, pulled him to consciousness from the dream-terror. It rang out in the sombre stillness of the lonely house like the cry of some wounded animal, trapped in a jungle thicket. He awoke, sitting up, still listening to that voice of fright that wasn't, somehow, his voice.

The cold sweat of terror stood out on his brow below the dark cluster of his curls. He sat up in bed, rigid, waiting for the terror to seize him. There came the quick, muffled padding of his mother's footsteps in the hallway, and through his whole body ran a renewed deliciousness of life and well-being. The rigidness ran out of him, as the Spring thaw loosens ice. Her white, protecting presence, in the darkness of his room, seemed immense, august, like a world of warm, sweet sunlight. In her arms he was buoyed up, high above the dark and nameless terror, and sleep came, unsummoned, unasked for, like a benediction.

But such dreams were of the night time only. By day, there were the knight and the princess. He could see them by simply looking over the shoulder of his tutor as they sat together "at school" in the silence of the drawing room, with the windows open, and the droning of bees sifting in with the pale scent of the honeysuckle. The sunlight came in drowsily and fell on the piano with its heavy darkness of roses in a great glass bowl, gleamed from a marble corner of the fireplace, and picked out the dingy ruffle and aristocratic nose of an ancestor on the wall.

His tutor was a tall man with long white hands and an air of having preserved his youth delicately, as one might preserve old rose petals in a lacquer cabinet. He wore a light brown wig, whose stitches appeared faintly in the parting when he bent his head. In the town, where he presided at the little shingled library open during three afternoons of the week, he was popular with the older ladies. His face was round and rosy, and with his eyeglasses giving his mild blue eyes a serious expression, he looked like an elderly cherub. He wore bright blue ties and light checked waistcoats, walked with a tripping gait, and smelled faintly of hairwash and perfume, and the older ladies of the town spoke very highly of him. He was always so gentlemanly. He had never married but had devoted his life to his mother and sister, and this, while it had helped to preserve him so perfectly, was very self-sacrificing. The boy's mother, he had often assured him, even at an age when poetic allusions were difficult, was a blossom, a flower, an angel; the perfect expression of a perfect era that had been and had fled from the South. She swept into the drawing room now and again during the morning lessons, putting the flowers to rights, and then his smile was gallant and deferential; a tribute

which she received with gracious reserve as a queen might receive, at arms' length, a wreath of roses.

And always the boy sat there dreaming. When the moist blue eyes rested on his face, the pencil in his hand responded uncomfortably to the vague necessities of multiplication and the dates of the Norman conquest. When the quiet voice ceased its dry prodding, the muscles that had responded unwillingly relaxed, and consciousness flowed out again toward the bright tinsel land of his reveries. . . .

The princess waved, and her hand was a white rose petal, caught in the castle ivy; and the knight on the hill doffed his plume and galloped off toward the sunset. Liquid and clear the bird-notes fell, and Robin Hood strode through the forest. China shepherdesses danced to the tune of a China shepherd summoning the magic twilight from mountain caves and valleys. Round and round they whirled, like gossamer insects, caught in the drowsy sunlight. . . . Round and round until his head swam and grew heavy. The droning of bees and the dry voice of his tutor came from a faraway hilltop. The droning receded, approached, receded again; approached with a startling loudness. He sat up. The princess had fled with the

shepherd; the knight had gone over the mountain. And instead of figures in blue and gold and gossamer, dancing on upland meadows, there were harsh black figures on paper, row on row of them, to add, divide and multiply.

II

SUCH THINGS WERE REAL TO HIM, THEN AND thereafter—his dreams and his nightmares. And for the rest, his mother's nearness pervaded his being like a beautiful benediction. She was a presence to him, not an individual. He was not conscious of her features, of her eyes, of her hair. She was an atmosphere in which he floated, from which, buoyed up, he could dream, into which he could retire again when those dreams were, for some strange reason, fearful. He grew, a slender, dark-haired child, and she called him her little knight, her protector.

Until the time of his twelfth year, there had been occasional visits from cousins in a neighbour-

ing city. They brought children to the old house, an occasional snatch of laughter, sunshine for its shadows. But the children, his mother had found, were a little rough. She had such high ideals for her son. Prominent among them was the desire that he should grow in the likeness of a delicate and handsome father who had died when the boy was only a few months old, and for the sake of whose memory she had withdrawn entirely from the life outside their home. Too many outside influences, she felt, must interfere with her boy's soul development. He belonged to her and not to the world. The great eyes in his delicate face were like windows through which one could look deeply into the hidden chambers of his dreams. To let him play with other boys of his age would be like taking some precious and delicate jewel from its case and throwing it to the world's tarnish. He had pronounced poetic and musical gifts as a very young child. She could see herself in the rôle of a poet's mother, a protecting and nourishing influence, a spiritual comrade of his growing years and the fame that would some day come to him. Otherwise life would be wholly without justice or meaning.

She never punished him. She never had to. She

could tell him, instead, little stories of the sadness of life, the injustice of the world around them and the truths that seclusion had taught her. She could speak to him of God, and in a more reverent tone of his father. She could recall the past before he had come to fulfil her life and give it a meaning and dedication, and she could dismiss its bitterness with a smile of gentle forgiveness. She could put on her hat if he vexed her, and sit by an open window. Then he would come into the room to stand motionless and trembling. She was going away to leave him, and the shadows around the house might seize her. She was going for ever and ever, and grief and fear ran through him. She took off her hat and smiled, and then he was forgiven. They were close, then, close together. The indissoluble net of their life was spun from the sad, fine phrases she spoke while he clung to her, still frightened. Was he not her knight, her gallant protector? Was she not alone in the world, and helpless? He had not meant to—she knew, she knew. Still he had hurt her.

The quite unconscious fear that some day he might outgrow her came gradually to take shape in a concentration on his "spiritual" development. For all that his grip on the world of facts was

tenuous enough, she encouraged him in all the escapes provided by his musical and poetic aptitudes. If mathematics distressed him, he could begin to take music more seriously. All the romanticized lives of poets and dreamers were theirs to draw from, and from each she selected a silver thread to bind her son closer. . . .

Love that had become disembodied should raise his spirit above his body. He should grow a living testimonial of the past that had fled from her, limned in the misty perfection of a dream. The slow decay of the house around them she saw as the authentic frame for her sorrow. The quiet ruin of things was the consolation of her martyrdom. She had been crucified, and the hand of time had cut her down, bleeding; and a small boy's fantastic sensitivity would cling to his sense of her suffering as the pious cling to the cross.

People would talk, but it did not matter, for she was a religious woman. Heaven and peace were here and now for those who could use their sorrow. In this flesh of her flesh she would seal her aspirations, all the remote, sacred untouched things that life had promised and never yielded, and in time they would bear fruit in the world. As the boy grew older he should come to see the undiminished

brightness of her appearances against the sombre background of their home as a sign, a portent on the furthest horizon.

And he seemed so very happy. That was the first full measure of her reward. He began of his own accord to put together little symphonies of word and sound. The seasons came and went, and with each year the great oaks, the dark, protecting screen of the woodland, put forth new leaves and branches to shelter the old house in its umbrageous silence. The town, only a few miles away, stirred from its sloth and pushed out tentacles in the shape of roads and new "developments." The defiance of her withdrawal lost its edge. She thought of herself more calmly as making an art of life, perfecting the finest facets of existence. People said many things about her which were not true, for they hated her as she became a legend. They spoke of the old house invisible behind its mantle of shadow. They said it was mysterious and haunted. And this was very true.

III

He spent a few months as a freshman in a small and exclusive college. He could never tell what happened, for he was not used to living, but the worst of it had been his dreams. Again and again that cry of distress that had broken through the stillness of his childhood slumbers, that cry that was not his voice, but the voice of some hoarse little animal within him, sounded loud through the slumbering dormitory. Windows were raised, a mutter of voices sounded above the droning of insects in the heavy dusk of the campus. Doors were pushed open, above and below, on the gallery tiers with their wrought-iron railings. A mocking cry or two penetrated the

whispering of foliage, the dry rustle of the ivy against the old brick of the dormitory façade. He sat up in bed as in childhood years before, his brow damp beneath the clusters of dark hair that still curled. And instead of the rustle of his mother's robe in the hallway, that had seemed like the flutter of angels' wings, the mocking cries of his classmates disturbed from slumber by his foolish dream, fell to silence again. He was alone, and the terror within him had no solace. The moon was caught in the plane tree branches out there on the campus, and the boughs lay across its light. In every aspect of things, the shadows of his room, the very splendour of the stars outside swarming across the sky, were elements of his lonely detachment and terror. All feeling of solidarity with the world of his fellows was denied him. He couldn't sleep or study, but would sit at night near the window that faced south, where across a shadowy loom of mountains lay his shadowy home. He was taken ill and had to be removed to the infirmary. There they thought he had been working too hard, and he let them think it. The doctor pronounced him perfectly sound; quite a healthy youngster, in fact. He ought to go home for a week or so, relax and rest. He went home and never came back.

His mother was very happy. He needed her more than anything. The world was incapable of understanding him, because he was too fine for the world, even as she was beginning to suspect that she had always been. It was at her own insistence that he had gone to college. Of his own accord he would never have left her. But these things, college education and so forth, belonged in the tradition. She had packed his trunk, bought him little things for his room, mounted her own photograph in a special travelling case and that of his father in another smaller one, arranged a bag for all his toilet articles, and even insisted on giving him an allowance. He did not want it; he would not know what to do with money, he had never had any before, but then she had a perfectly definite idea that young men in college had money. She sent him on his journey under the chaperonage of the private tutor. He turned his back considerately on mother and son when they took leave of each other on the station platform, and blew his nose violently into a tan silk handkerchief. He was profoundly affected. . . . He described it to his mother and sister as the moment of greatest agitation of his life. . . .

She had done her best and bravest, and no one

could say, least of all herself, whether she did not suspect her boy would be back with her rather shortly. She tried fervently to believe that she hoped he wouldn't. But in her letters—and of this also she may have been unconscious—she left little avenues and loopholes of escape. He must not think, if he "didn't get along," that that was at all peculiar. So many men who had done great things hadn't gotten along very well with the outside world. He must not fail to write her each night everything that had happened during the day and anything that was on his mind. She would, of course, pray for him, but she must know always exactly what dangers and temptations confronted him so that she might meet them constantly in her prayers. And if he would go alone by himself, often, and just think, she would "send herself to him" in the spirit. He would not know how, but she would be there to hear him. If he ever felt ill he was not to linger—not a single moment. And so he came home.

A trip to Italy was decided on. A year in the garden loveliness of the old world would do more, she thought, to shape his spirit than any number of years spent in beating his wings against the impossible realities of the world that both of them

distrusted. They returned. He was safe under her wing again, safer than ever, for now they shared the wine of memories from a cup of gold. She saw it all so clearly. In that year of Italy, her love for him had been a symbol of life's eternal beauty against the misty perfection of the past. Sometimes he would wander off by himself, and return looking unhappy, with shadows under his eyes, but they disappeared at the first touch of her eyes or her hand. He always kept flowers in her room, almost like a lover, but with more than a lover's adoration. She stood on her balcony overhanging the Arno, the evening solemnity of the gold-brown ancient city broken by the cries of hawkers, the rattle of wheels on the cobbles, a babble of voices from the bridge below, and it seemed to her as she raised her eyes from the streets to the low green hills where the sun lay flaming, where the grave, tall cypresses awaited the night, that the very riddle of existence had yielded to her hand. The knowledge of her power over him gave her a feeling of reverence. The coloured shadows of empty churches found her at peace with herself in prayer. The instrument of his life lay beneath her fingers, responsive to her lightest touch, and as her soul took wing with the smoke of censers the last mist

of doubt dissolved like a cloud in a solemn sunrise. The purity of her prayer was its own answer; how else could one understand the faith that had built these shrines? And he was safe; he had so little use for other women. He was friendly with them; always at his ease, quite unconscious of them. With men he was more shy, perhaps a little too diffident. And she watched him. If love came to him, it must be great and exalting. From all other loves she would protect him, for she felt that women might love him too much.

They returned, and in their home again she could fold those protecting wings and rest in relaxed happiness on the joys that they had shared. And now before his gaze and more consciously than ever she began to carry the white cross of her self-inflicted martyrdom. It began with a short spell of illness that followed a cold rainy autumn, when the fading foliage of the trees circumscribed the dignified silences of the old house with a wall of impenetrable night. In the fever of that illness she saw things that she had never dreamed of; things that filled her with fear. The terror of old age in isolation; a terror she had always smiled at, never believed in, took possession of her. She clung to him like a child. She could not bear to

have him long away from her room. His love brought her back to life, but she knew then that without his love she could never live. And when she rose again it was as an invalid who could speak of her fading beauty with a gentle, wistful smile.

IV

He grew into his nineteenth year slight, not very tall, with a thin face whose features were by a shade too delicately moulded. There was a betraying sweetness in his smile and an innocence in his wide grey eyes which women found very appealing. He had a shy manner, a low, deferential voice, and when he glanced directly at you his eyes flattered you like a woman's. In talking he used his hands, rather thin, small hands, a great deal. He smiled a good deal, as though to himself, but after that college experience his eyes remained vaguely shadowed.

He seemed a little uneasy in his own company. Solitude, that had been his joy in childhood, weighed down on him now and then heavily, and

there were times when the future seemed strangely foreshortened. The war dragged on so long, and they might never get to Paris. He was utterly without friendship in the circumscribed life around them. The thoughts of the outer world, the world he had tried to get along in so briefly and failed, weighed down on him.

He could not, of course, talk to his mother about this. The recent illness had left her with a pain in her side that came over her, now, so often. She took even less interest in the servants and the routine of the house, and lay for whole afternoons on the couch behind the mosquito bars of the veranda. Her smile was brave and wistful. She called him, again, her gallant knight, her comforter. It would be sacrilege to distress her with his own forebodings. In the face of such gentle bravery, it seemed sacrilege even to think of them, even to have them. She had given her life for him; suffered that he might grow free. All that was good had come from her. The very least he owed her was great strength and fortitude.

They continued to speak together as in his childhood the language of bright symbols that had always been for her a romantic indulgence and for him an expression of life's potential splendours.

Such words as pure, clean and chivalrous were often on her lips. He worked and walked with his dogs, noting the quiet life of wood and field in moods that varied as imperceptibly as the play of cloud shadows across them. The town was a foreign world to him, but still there were faces that turned to look after him kindly. A few voices spoke to him here and there. A few shaded driveways with a loom of white walls beyond them knew his nervous, hesitant tread.

Always before twilight deepened he must be back with her, for this was the hour when her pain grew, when her greeting smile was most wistful, when the ache of the wordless past caused her to reach out her hand toward him; a hand that with each year's passing grew more childlike and fluttering. They read together, then, before darkness fell, or they sat quietly with the roses he had gathered in the garden in a tall vase between them.

And then came sounds of war, not vague and distant as before—but immediate, wrathful, threatening. They came, and the echoed tramp of feet, the muttering wrath of the headlines, penetrated their sombre remoteness; breaking in on a peace that for some time now was distantly, strangely, troubled.

V

WITH HER IT WAS MUCH AS WHEN SHE had sent him to college. All that one did or did not do in life was traditional, part of a heritage as concrete as the family portraits. She had invoked this solemn name in all previous decisions regarding her son. The answer had always been final. He must do the thing that had always been done. This time it was more final than ever.

And she had a pride. If she had retired from the world it was not to hang her head but that she might hold it higher. Vanity alone would have set her in the course they must follow, and vanity had been back of every gesture she had made since the

death of her husband and before that, of her father. The garb of the martyr that she had drawn around her so gracefully, so becomingly, was light as gossamer, and now before her there lay a cross to pick from the dust and carry bravely in the gaze of the world she distrusted. She must say, if the question were asked her: "My son, my light—yes, he, too, has gone with the brave," and in the knowledge of her love and dependence on him, the assurance of his glorious, poetic future, would lie the measure of her sacrifice in the eyes of those around her. And there were other thoughts as well, thoughts which the private tutor distilled into the atmosphere of their home from his careful readings of editorial columns. The Germans were the modern Vandals, and over the gentle glories of Europe for three long years had hovered the threat of cannon and the terror of doomsday destruction. Here was a Cause, more glorious even than the liberty of Greece for which Byron had fought and died.

They were all very brave about it. The only one who cried at all was the old mulatto nurse who still kept his room and clothes in order and darned his stockings. She had a premonition, and sat in his room, in the half darkness, crooning to herself, and would not be comforted. But his mother

watched him with her dark eyes; eyes in which, for as long as he could remember, he had never seen a tear. When it came time to pack, she was very efficient. And the night before he went away, they dressed carefully for dinner, and drank wine in the great dining-room where four candles were like stars in an empty firmament.

Afterwards they walked on the lawn, arm in arm, like two lovers brave in their parting, while she told him in a low voice all of the high and sacred things she had dreamed for him. He felt very sure of himself, very brave—uplifted, somehow, and exalted at the thought of all he might accomplish in splendid bravery to deserve such a trust. The fireflies that night were brighter than usual around the clusters of the rose bushes, and the clouds of a coming storm mingled oppressively with the clouds of foliage that had screened them always in their world of shadows.

The thought of danger was very remote from both of them. France was too far away, and it didn't seem at all likely to her that they would send a sensitive, delicate boy to fight with bombs in the trenches. Undoubtedly someone higher up, some general, perhaps even the head of the army, would single him out for his fine bearing, courtesy

and noble ideals. This again she had talked over with the private tutor whose cheeks in the last years had taken on an autumnal tinge. And in this, also, he had acquiesced with real enthusiasm.

She sent him off with noble phrases, in the halo of her blessing. As to more practical possessions, she gave him her portrait in miniature, a lock of her hair bound in gold fillet, a Bible and a morocco-bound edition of Shelley.

He had three months in an officers' training camp and was sent to France without even the opportunity of returning to say good-bye.

PART II

THE SANDERSON RITUAL

I

IT WAS MID MAY OF THE DESPONDENT SPRING OF 1918 when I first saw him.

The place was the Café de la Paix on the square of a provincial town on the Loire. The time was mid-afternoon. Being a candidate for commission newly arrived at the artillery training school, he had no business to be drinking at that hour in the day. It was six weeks prior to his first meeting with Colonel Sanderson at an artillery brigade camp in Brittany, and the mess of nerves that followed.

And there was nothing remarkable in that meeting, except in retrospect. We look back on things, and they assume a significance that they never

possessed at the time they happened. We arrange them in order, and thus imagine that the events of life arrange themselves in a pattern. I remember distinctly a feeling of amusement. He was somehow a little too good to be true.

At any rate, he was holding forth to the group around his table, and his voice was thin with excitement. It was not the excitement that arises from external pressure, but very plainly a matter of nerves. He was flushed, his eyes were very bright, he had been drinking. And evidently he had no head for drink. His small hands fluttered to his face, and to the ash tray, breaking off cigarettes, lighting them, throwing them away. All the time he went on talking in that high, excited voice, about something that had happened during firing practice that morning . . . something that concerned the non-commissioned leader of his section.

His type was as strange to me as I could see it was to the group of men around him. But I wasn't of them, at the moment, and his hysteria, exhibitionism,—call it what you want—passed at an angle from me. One or two of them were looking steadily and thoughtfully down into their glasses. A small, fresh-faced, lively youngster who sat immediately opposite, was staring at him round-

eyed and rubbing his nose with his finger. One of the men of my own section, a fat candidate named Boyd, with a face as heavy and devoid of expression as a lump of unleavened dough, pushed his chair back suddenly, rose and waddled off. From his frown he may have been disgusted, but it may have been his turn to pay for the drinks. I never found out. But the man sitting beside the boy, a chap I had never seen before, whispered something to him and nudged him. The group began to disperse, one or two with grins on their faces. The effect of that whisper and nudge was magical. The boy put his glass down. He looked like a person who has been dropped, spinning, out of a region of sunlight into a yawning abyss.

He was no longer the centre of interest, the strength of the wine had gone out of him, and he sat, a bundle of dejection in front of me in the café with his shoulders drooping and beads of perspiration gathered on his forehead below his curls. The effect of his little drama had been entirely negative; no one had relished his story; one or two of his audience had even eyed him suspiciously; evidently he was not very popular. The heat and inertia of the afternoon kept me sitting there. I

ordered another *demi* and sat on to wait for the bugle.

Behind me at a marble-topped table, a French major of colonials, with a good deal of gold leaf on his coat, was arguing the dismal foreboding of the latest *communique* in low, earnest tones with a very pink-faced captain of cavalry, in a uniform as bright and hopeful as a summer sky, who sat with his head thrown back murmuring "tiens, tiens" in a bored tone and staring at the flies on the ceiling. A click of billiard balls, a scrape and tinkle of glasses and an intermittent dull clatter of voices in French and English drifted out through the swinging doors of the billiard room. The afternoon sunshine flooded the empty, dusty square; broke in through rents in the blue and white striped awnings of the dusty *terrasse*, and picked out spots of red and blue from groups of battered cane chairs drawn up beside the empty marble tables.

The boy roused himself suddenly, passed his hand over his face with a fluttering gesture as though to brush away a cobweb, and I noticed for the first time his companion.

He had been sitting with his back to me while the group at the table was dispersing, but now his

head was turned and I caught his face in profile. It was pock-marked, dingy and unprepossessing. He was looking away from the boy, staring with a frown out of the open window and across the square where a row of houses, half screened by heavy clusters of immobile foliage, presented to the hot spring sunshine an array of dusty walls and windows with their broken shutters half drawn, like drowsy eyelids. Someone from inside the billiard room bawled out *"Emilienne, Emilienne,"* and a slovenly little bar maid pattered past me in carpet slippers, gripping a bottle and glasses in her hand. And the boy's companion turned his head at the disturbance. I listened, half amused and half drowsily, to their conversation.

"You'll spoil," the older man was saying, "you'll spoil everything." The boy looked hurt and murmured something indistinguishable. His companion went on a trifle severely.

"You've no head for drink. No head whatsoever."

He turned and beckoned to a waiter who walked over toward them indifferently, swinging on the balls of his feet and swishing at the flies with his napkin. I noticed that the older man's head was bald on top and that a number of greasy dark locks

fell over his coat collar behind. He murmured something to the waiter, and the boy glanced up.

"No," the man said. "No more for you."

The boy ran his hand through his hair.

"Oh," he said. "Really, I'm not a child."

His companion stared at the table top solemnly.

"Till you've learned," he said, "till you've learned not to talk at improper moments."

I had half raised my glass to my lips, and set it down on the table, amused. My drowsiness had fled. There was something painfully earnest about the comedy being played at the table ahead of me. Evidently it was not the first time this sort of thing had happened. I glanced around. The table where they sat was isolated, and of my own presence behind them they did not appear to have any suspicion. It was not eavesdropping on my part, but merely inertia that kept me sitting there. There was a crash of broken glass from the billiard room. Someone bawled out in English "Emilienne, get out," and then "*va-t-en*, scat," and the little waitress appeared through the swinging doors with a frightened expression on her face. The proprietor, who had been dozing and perspiring at his high-top desk, shot upright suddenly and began

automatically counting the coins arranged before him on a mat of red velour.

The boy brightened suddenly and began to chatter. I watched his face, half turned toward me. It was like an April sky. Where there had been clouds, all was serene again. He put his hand in his blouse pocket and drew out a crumpled letter. I gathered that he had found it waiting for him at the school. There was a poem enclosed, clipped from a magazine. He handed it to his companion who raised it with both hands about an inch from his nose as a squirrel raises a nut, and scanned it morosely. The boy spoke:

"*She* sent it."

The older man said:

"Ah, your mother." He put it down, took a long draught of the beer the waiter had just placed before him, and then raised the paper to his face again. "By you," he said. His voice sounded a trifle ironical. "Quite inspired; ah, yes, quite inspired."

I glanced down at the leather bound set of *L'Illustration,* the waiter had left at my table, and when I raised my eyes again the boy had swung around in his chair and turned his back on the older man. He was gazing away toward the billiard

room, his nose in the air, with an expression of childish pique on his face. His companion stretched out a hand with long, white fingers, the nails very soiled, and tapped him on the shoulder consolingly.

"If your mother likes it, ah, yes, of course . . ." he murmured.

The boy spoke from over his shoulder.

"You are too cross, really." He turned. The older man was staring down at the piece of paper, and seemed for the moment unconscious of him. He raised both hands suddenly, palm upward.

"No light in it," he said. "No lift. Not like most of your things."

The boy's "Oh," seemed slightly comforted. His companion tapped him on the shoulder again. I caught his next remark in fragments.

"Sieglitz," it sounded like . . . "Sieglitz gets rhythms out of suspended commas. . . ."

"Don't be absurd," the boy said.

The ears of the man went suddenly pink.

"When you know," he said, "when you have learned. All rhythm is not sound." His voice trailed off. I heard something that sounded like "occurrence of words on pages."

The boy pushed his chair back.

"I don't want to listen. We've argued that before. You know how it always ends."

His companion raised his glass, drained it, and then murmured something inaudible.

"But of course," the boy said, "of course."

His face brightened. The April-sky look again. There came another crash of glass from the billiard room, and the same voice, a trifle maudlin this time sang out *"Emilienne, O Emilienne."* The small waitress appeared scurrying around the tables like a frightened hare, and the French officers behind me rose and thoughtfully paid for their drinks. The two ahead of me had relapsed into silence for the moment, and then began talking of Paris. "But France at its best wasn't Italy. . . ."

"Oh, of course not," the boy breathed, "of course not," and then suddenly became very animated. 'How glad people had been to see us . . . the peasants especially. It was really thrilling. He had so much to write his mother. If only he could manage to get through the awful mathematics stuff at the school. . . .'

The older man sighed.

"When you know, when you have really seen—Italy." He breathed the word as though it carried

a benediction with it. "Florence in May," he said.

He started suddenly with a "What's that?" and stared out into the sunlight of the square. The slumbrous peace of the hot afternoon was broken as an immense, rattletrap camion, packed with a detail from the Senegalese labour battalion quartered behind the school, bounced and roared over the cobbles. The black faces, under red fezzes, without a single distinguishing feature, made a blurred composite of savage dullness broken here and there by the gleam of an eyeball or the flash of teeth. The driver in a blue peaked cap bent over, rounding the corner, and sounded a squeaky tin horn furiously, and the whole load rattled around the bend and disappeared, leaving a powder of white dust in the warm air. I paid for my drinks and got up to go.

The man and the boy ahead of me were scraping their chairs back preparatory to leaving. The boy drew a billfolder from his pocket. He seemed a little embarrassed. "I . . . really—" he said. The older man drained his glass.

"You pay," he said. "Of course you pay. Next time you'll know better."

The voice from the billiard room had risen this time in a bellow. *"Emilienne, O Emilienne."* The

little waitress appeared again, running with a bottle and glasses. I heard the voices of the man and boy behind me as I stepped out into the hot sunlight of the square.

They had come in with the latest batch of officer candidates from Fort Oglethorpe in the States. I had observed the detachment earlier in the afternoon tramping in dust and despondency from the railroad yards near the river up the long, shaded avenue that led to the school. Their march was timed to the "hup" of a shrill-voiced sergeant whose razor-blade face seemed, as it were, squeezed out by the high collar of his carefully tailored uniform. The composite of brown-grey faces, filtering by, under the dappled shadows of the ancient trees, ran out past me like a cinema strip registering variations on a theme of dejection. All enthusiasm had gone out of them in the course of extensive wanderings, in freight cars, through the back-areas of embattled France. From under the rims of the peaked overseas caps, sweat, streaming down, cut furrows through the grime of many days confinement in *Hommes 40-Chevaux 8*. Their papers had gone astray, and on all sides they had been treated, during the last month, in a manner

unworthy the dignity of candidate officers and gentlemen. Their packs were heavy with equipment, and their hearts loaded with grievance. Their footsteps rang out from the cobbles and disturbed the peace of quiet provincial gardens, slumbering in the mid-May sunshine behind walls of the yellow Loire valley tuffa. A bell chimed from the convent tower, next door to the sombre pile of the artillery school, and two black-clad figures slipped out of the wicket gate, and without a glance from their cowls at the disastrous worldliness before them, became one with the silent shadows of the avenue. The shouldered packs and the cap tops flowed in a jogging ripple, like a muddy stream, under the drooping chestnuts. They wheeled to the right, and the embracing wings of the ancient barracks received them in the stillness of a sandy courtyard, between black and staring windows.

Those two were in that stream. And now the boy had ceased to be an individual in a shadowy world, illumined by the warmth of his mother's protection. He was one of a multitude moving and sweating, to the rhythm of a grim and incomprehensible purpose.

II

That elaborate play of confidence, that intimacy, as it were, on a special plane of understanding between the boy and his unprepossessing friend; the whole exhibition of fatuousness, eagerness and shyness of which I had been an unwitting spectator, struck me at the time as remarkably absurd.

It was not the sort of a thing you ordinarily overheard or witnessed in the army. The boy's enthusiasms seemed to me to have a febrile quality about them; his eagerness to entertain, to be the centre of things, was nothing if not feminine. He had placed his hand under the arm of the older man while they walked ahead of me up the street, and

the very gesture was soft, intimate, confiding. He was a total stranger to me at the time. I knew nothing at all about him. He was simply, as I would have put it, a nice, polite and courteous young ass, out of his place in the uniform. It was only when I began to realize that these attitudes were a definite part of him, that the way he had talked and acted was the only way he could talk and act, that he began to appear to me even more tragic than absurd.

Those two had gravitated together in training camp back in the States and had stayed together ever since. It must have seemed to both of them like a special dispensation of Providence. They had formed an intimate circle apart from the casual brutalities of army life. They even talked a special language of their own; a language in which the delicate and spiritual figured prominently. As long as the boy had someone to talk to, someone definitely like him, his loneliness remained concealed and his inadequacy in life did not trouble him. And I suppose it was quite an experience for him. He had never talked intimately to anyone before except his mother and his private tutor. To stray on to another being who had the gift of tongues and a background in culture, must have

compensated for the terrible mechanical routine of those first army experiences. He was immensely dependent. He could give vent to his secret enthusiasms, and so he was happy. He was also very nervous. But then, since leaving the States, the element of novelty had entered into his experiences. He was young and he was seeing new lands and faces. It was Spring, and the green rolling valley of the Loire lay around him, in all its exuberant softness. There were mathematics and firing tables to contend with. There was the routine discipline of the school. But these were tolerable burdens, as long as he did not give way to his nerves, and these the older man was nursing thoughtfully.

And I don't know much about him, although the boy told me later that he was a "distinguished, a very distinguished portrait painter." He didn't look distinguished to me in any sense. He looked rather like a monk released to the daylight after a long penance in his cell. His pallor and his hairiness were both unpleasant. He was by faith a Theosophist and an admirer of a man by the name of Leadbeater, or something of the sort, who had had or was expecting to have, revelations at a place called Adyar. Whether or not he had the revelations, he had had a small red book, and I think it

was rather the fact of the book than the contents which went to the boy's head originally. No one in the army ever read books. No one in the army cared for poetry, for music, for anything "decent." It was rather a large army, so the generalization was probably untrue. But it was accurate enough within the limits of his observation. And here was a man who not only read a book but carried it buttoned up in the upper pocket of his blouse and studied it in the mess room after the kitchen police had wiped the grease off the tables. It was enough. The rest followed naturally.

The very breath of his army existence lay in that curious friendship—at least up to the point when I first met him. He was unpleasant to look at, that Theosophist painter. He carried around with him an air of gloom that was slightly unhealthy and contagious. He was a pacifist at heart and hated the war. He had been dragged into it like a prisoner loaded with chains. He had found a mind he could touch and inspire; and in the glow of his ideal youth the boy stood out, transfigured by his own necessity for understanding. His eyes when they rested on the boy's face were hungry, sometimes; sometimes they were those of an old dog who watches the puppy at his feet, content

in his own assurance of wisdom, of protection and fidelity.

And it was fitting, since they had formed a friendship on a plane apart, that they should disregard certain of the more commonplace dictates of army propriety. The boy had no head for mathematics, and mathematics was a necessity in the artillery to which he aspired—on account, I suppose of the boots and spurs. In class room examination, the older man could shift and squirm around in his chair until the boy who sat in back of him could read the answers on his paper. It was dishonourable, an act unbecoming a future officer and a Darrow. His cheeks flamed at first when he thought of it. But to flunk would bring disgrace on himself and his mother—and there was nothing else for it. You either went ahead or you went backwards. As the older man pointed out, he simply could not miss out on his commission. It wasn't merely a question of dignity. It was the fact that he wouldn't be able to last out the dog's life of a common soldier. And if one failed and the other succeeded, they were bound to be separated. . . .

They were separated anyway at the time of the boy's first meeting with Colonel Sanderson, but then it was a separation which might have been

avoided except for one of those incalculable whims on the boy's part—a prepossession that his friend's usefulness to him had expired. His callousness in the face of this loyalty, was the first definite clue I got to something rather extraordinary in his make-up. Unpleasant, perhaps, but in its way startling and pitiful. He had won his boots and spurs, then, and was out to shine. He had made new friends and was through with the old ones. In the light of his new excitement, his old friend appeared shabby and grotesque. He was left with the book by the man in Adyar to comfort him, and that was all.

It was all very strange, very mixed up in the boy's version of it that I heard some six weeks later. But now he was on the full crest of the little wave that had carried him on from the beginning of his army experiences; that filled him with the sense of getting ahead and living out his mother's hopes for him; that broke finally, in a curious and treacherous fashion, against the barrier of a fatal inadequacy.

I saw the boy at infrequent intervals during the remainder of my short term in that crumbling old artillery school, with its cumbrous grey wings, its cavernous hallways in the *Invalides* manner with

stacks of dusty standards colouring the shadows, its great, glistening roaches that dropped down on you from the water pipes, and the fleas in the bed ticks that had bitten recruits from time immemorial. He plodded through the routine performances of the day, the dull class room lectures, the sweltering tactical rides, over the low hills, *en bicyclette*, the dust and explosions on the brown, level firing range, only that he might arise from his lethargy and shine, chattering and eager, always a little drunk, at the café during the evening. He seemed happy enough. I heard, quite by accident, that despite the persistent co-operation of his friend, and the long night hours when they sat bent over drill regulations and firing manuals in their stone cell of a room under the eaves, that he stood very low in his courses. But he had built up from the poor and dusty proportions of things around him the splendours of some new dream. Boots and spurs and Sam Browne belt—these things shone with their increasing nearness. Beyond, lay—what? He did not know, but felt within him the response to his mother's glowing and courageous letters, the call to heroic adventure. Had not Byron been both a poet and a soldier? His mother had always distrusted the character of By-

ron, but his impassioned and chivalrous unreality they had both admired. He was planning in his head a great epic, to celebrate the first landing of American troops on French soil—if only his friend would not press him so much every evening with all the figures and data he hated. He was young, and everywhere he looked, every horizon, no matter how drab, was tinged with the glow of a dream. Around every corner lurked the possibility of the imagined and splendid. And so he seemed to prosper.

I saw them many times, in the evening, together. They walked along under the gloomy arch of the heavy horse-chestnuts, arm in arm with their heads close, whispering, like uneasy conspirators in a world too busy to take them seriously.

And then my orders of assignment came through. I lost sight of him for many weeks. When we met again, it was under very different circumstances, under the shadow, as it were, of Colonel Sanderson.

III

I WAS ASSIGNED TO THE REGIMENT COMMANDED BY Colonel Sanderson at a brigade camp for artillery in Brittany, not far from the clean and pleasant little seaport of Vannes.

It was a bleak enough place, a mere profusion of shacks, in the French army manner, scattered over a barren, dessicated upland, a few miles from the coast. From the observation towers on the firing range, your eye wandered across a brown prairie, dotted with clumps of scrub pine, dropping gradually to the coast where sea and land seemed to join in a thin fringe of mist. To the east, the church steeples of Vannes rose above the low rise and fall of the hills, like the masts of wrecks sunk

to the bottom of a heaving brown ocean, and the camp in its vast disorder, crawled up from the valley bottoms and straggled out over the hills.

He was slight, a few inches under medium height, with a face whose most pronounced characteristic was its absence of chin. This, with a long nose and protuberant, large eyes set close together, gave it a certain unpleasant resemblance to a fish left to expire on a sunny wharf. His mouth was large, and his lower lip had a tendency to droop. It was an imbecile face, and it left on you a powerful and unpleasant impression.

He made up for his personal shortcomings in various ways, all of them characteristic. His uniform and boots were flawless. On foot, he sidled along at a nervous, rapid gait, flourishing the silver-handled riding crop he invariably carried, the black ribbon of his *pince-nez* dandifying the grey brown of his perfectly fitting blouse. He always minced his feet delicately out of the mud and dust, and he had an odd way of turning his head suddenly and peering over his shoulder, as though the presence of his shadow behind him were a matter for a little panic.

He was very difficult to place. He was solitary and silent. There were various stories current

about his origin, not one of which I have ever taken the trouble to authenticate. They all had one thing in common—that they were unpleasant and derogatory. I believe, however, that he had spent a number of years as embassy attaché in various parts of the world. He spoke French fluently, with an absence of accent that, in an American army officer, was almost indecent. He rode well, sitting firmly in the saddle, bending forward slightly, absorbing every motion of his horse as if all his bones were pliant.

He bore about with him, wherever he went, a certain air of mystery, as if his real personality were shut up in a small steel cabinet inside him, of which he alone possessed the key. On the rare occasions when he spoke of himself, it was bitterly. You judged that the world had too often offended his sense of dignity. And he hated women. The story told about him that he had been swindled and abandoned by an Hungarian *variété* performer while on official duty in Berlin, that he had followed her all around Europe until his dismissal from the service was imminent, that her favourite piece of coquetry was to drop her handkerchief in a station or restaurant and kick him when he went to pick it up, that he had finally been cashiered

when he was found drunk, near the Parc Monceau, lying on his face, with one boot gone, his head wound in a silk scarf and still clinging to the harness of two miserable lap dogs, was simply a piece cut from whole cloth and embroidered by malice. The thing went a little deeper than gossip or malice. I had it on the adjutant's word that the only time he had ever heard him curse was when someone inadvertently mentioned the name of his mother.

And here again the truth is difficult to dissolve from the persistent unpleasant rumours and the cold, malicious gossip that were our sole means of combating the uneasiness he inspired in everyone. The favourite tale placed her as the head of a flourishing establishment in Washington where tired Senators and homesick Congressmen could turn for those feminine attentions without which the Legislative faculties of a great nation grow dull, and pointed to Colonel Sanderson's position and advancement as a chivalrous return for services complacently rendered. More conservative estimates placed her as the widow of one western Senator and the mistress of another. She may have been either or both. All that was positively known

is that Colonel Sanderson preferred for various reasons to veil his origin in mystery.

But that he had "influence" behind him, no one could doubt. He came and went as he pleased, disappearing in the direction of Paris for a week at a time. Whatever reprimands reached our regiment from the brigade were couched in mild terms, almost persuasively. The Brigadier himself, except when he lost his temper completely, adopted a courteous and suave manner in the neighbourhood of our headquarters. And this attitude, filtering down the ranks, was infectious. Colonel Sanderson was a superior being, with superior powers behind him. It was only when you knew him well, that this superiority suggested something remotely akin to the supernatural.

He was unpleasant to look at and to be near. He had in addition a power I find difficult to describe, of finding out sore spots in people and touching them with an intimacy and accuracy that was appalling. He could fix you in a glance between the cold stare of the large protuberant eyes and the droop of his lower lip, and hold you at times much as a small boy will hold a fly against a window pane. He seemed to throw his whole weight

into his stare and lean against you with it. It was as startling and effective as the blow of a fist. And it had this curious effect in addition—that once having felt its weight, you began to dodge it.

We took our meals in one of a number of zinc shacks like abandoned cracker-tins, kicked about aimlessly on a dusty knoll near brigade headquarters. From this high point you saw the whole encampment spread out before you. You saw dust, sheds and more dust, always a brown haze of it in the valleys, artillery parks, horselines, the glaring roofs of two immense storesheds like airplane hangars, a net-work of white roads with trucks crawling along them, details of men in brown swinging along in dense-packed columns like swarming insects bent with enormous zeal on incomprehensible errands.

The windows of the mess hall were always kept tight-shut to keep the dust out and the flies in. They would come, in the face of whole paragraphs in the regulations and the agitated efforts of the little regimental doctor who spent whole days in elaborate and solemn experiment around the garbage cans and incinerators near the barracks below. The mess table, a long, plank affair, with

wooden benches around it, was stained a dull brown with accumulations of butter, jam and grease that wouldn't scrub off. And around this table, the Sam Browne belts were arranged self-consciously, in order of importance.

At the head of the table sat Colonel Sanderson, and beside him, his adjutant, Captain Williams, a blond, florid young West Pointer, with an impressive moustache and a face that rather spoiled it. It was a round face, intended to be rosy and cherubic, which had become angry and stern and gotten itself childishly mussed up in the process. On his left sat Major O'Connor, a stout, boisterous Irishman, with a countenance like one of those ruddy masks children wear on Halloween. He had been a ward politician in his day, and still told politicians' jokes in the quarters at night, snapping his fingers just before the point came off and slapping his knees in a sort of ecstasy. Opposite him sat Major Gail, a reserved, gentlemanly sort of chap, a Bostonian I believe, with a good, clear face, pleasant eyes and courteous manners. All the lesser fry, beginning with the staff lieutenants, down through the battery commanders, were ranged around that fly-ridden table in order of importance, from the top, where the colonel leaned

solemnly over his plate, to the bottom where the latest arrival among the shavetails ate his stew and tried not to look unhappy. And throughout that room there rested a peculiar atmosphere, the special and singular creation of Colonel Sanderson.

The moment you stepped into the mess hall it enfolded you like an offensive fog over an innocent landscape. For the most part, a dead silence reigned, broken only by the clatter of dishes and the scraping of forks on tin plates. From his vantage point at the head of the table, the cold, calculated stare of the dead eyes in that long, fish-like face wandered up and down the double row of faces bent over the plates. Wherever the gaze fell, there appeared, as it were, a cold spot, a sense of shrinkage, a deepened timidity. Once in awhile he would bend over to exchange a remark with the round-faced young adjutant. There was a conspiratorial air about these exchanges, as if those two up there were cold-bloodedly and malevolently plotting something against the rest of us. He would speak in a whisper, the glint of his glasses hiding momentarily the stare of his heavy eyes. If there had been a mutter of conversation from the lower end of the room, it fell into a cathedral silence. His only utterances to the table in general were by

way of reference to some officer's performance during the day's manœuvres, spoken in a tone of flat, heavy sarcasm, without humour, without any definite purpose other than to crush. "Mr. Jones" (he was always attentive to the proprieties in addressing his junior officers) "put one over on the rest of you, today, gentlemen. Firing shrapnel at a dug-out target. The wrong target, Mr. Jones? A little louder, please. Oh, the wrong ammunition." Or, "Mr. Smith has improved on drill regulations. What was the new command to the drivers, Mr. Smith? Ah yes, you see, gentlemen . . ."

Trivial things, absurd in their way, no profanity, nothing at all vulgar. You writhed under them as though an icicle had been moved down your neck and along your spine. It was not a matter of words, but of the manner of delivering them, deliberately, insultingly, with always the sense of a cold sneer behind them. It was also that there was no come-back, no possible means of retaliation. You winced, if you were hit, while your neighbour quite childishly and very stupidly tittered. You also lost your appetite, possibly from swallowing your own venom. The scene suggested a gathering of nervous school children under the eye of a temperamental and sadistic master. The burly

first battalion major with his shoe-button eyes imbedded deeply in the fat of his face, swallowed his food in gulps and dashed off on the first duty pretext. No one else ever presumed to leave the table until after the Colonel had finished, wiped his lips and fingertips on a brown silk handkerchief, folded it and buttoned it carefully into the upper pocket of his tunic again.

The dull procession of hot dusty days filed past, and instead of getting used to him a misty and ineffectual resentment dogged you night and day. Discipline was slack. Outside that nerve-wracking mess room fuss and his equally curious habit of appearing at unexpected times in unexpected places to stare at you, his influence on the regiment was as negative as the effect of a nightmare on a healthy man. To the rank and file he was a legend and not a reality. The old army men who had known him in person or by reputation before the war, wagged their heads and held their tongues with that tough, veteran discretion which every old soldier uses to preserve himself from the foibles and idiosyncrasies of his Heaven-decreed superiors. The inexperienced suffered the most. Inoffensive young lieutenants with bland shiny faces turned out by the American college process like buttons for the same shoe, lost

their sleep and their appetites both. The fat doctor rolled his eyes and perspired into his soup. The headquarters officers clung together as though guarding some secret too precious for ordinary ears and assisted in the process of screening the Colonel in and freezing us out. As for the cause of this strained and curious agitation, he went his way and said nothing. On the worst days, when the thermometer hung around one hundred degrees Fahrenheit, he appeared cool, jaunty, a little clammy. The cold and isolated spirit that moved him was responsive only to its own concealed necessities and responsible to no one. The human element was almost entirely missing. A veiled, a slight but unmistakable atmosphere of threat hovered around you whenever he approached. If you looked for storms it was chiefly because the quiescence, the silence, the calm that he distilled, was unnatural.

IV

ONE SULTRY EVENING TOWARD THE MIDDLE of the month I was standing in the doorway of our officers' quarters, a plain board shack, with one long corridor and cells of rooms opening out of it, waiting for the truck that drove into the town, when a voice with a drawl to it spoke up out of the shadows behind me, and I turned to confront the boy, young Darrow.

He had gone out of my mind so completely in the last weeks that I didn't, for the moment, recognize him. He rose from the mound of a new bedding roll on which he had been sitting, having arrived, evidently, bag and baggage by the afternoon train from Tours. He said:

"It sure is nice to see someone you've run into before over here," and then, as though fearing that I might construe his remark as too familiar, added with great courtesy: "I took the liberty because I'm sure I saw you in the café there at Saumur."

He stood before me with a slight flush on his thin, clear face, his grey eyes very nice and deferential, shifting from one foot to the other, evidently a little conscious of his new Sam Browne belt and the bright gold bars on his shoulders. I put out my hand, and he dropped his own that felt like a small, limp sponge into it.

"Oh," I said. "It's you. So you got your commission after all?"

His eyes shone a little, and he ran his hand through his short curls.

"I reckon I did," he said. "It certainly was a miracle."

There was a peculiar, soft sweetness to his drawl, but the words were reassuringly frank, and he met my slightly amused gaze very steadily. I recalled the occasions when I had seen him holding forth in the Café de la Paix at artillery school and my original distrust of the effervescence of his mannerisms. Now they appeared to me quite genuine and rather engaging. I walked into my room, the

first to the right down the corridor, struck a light, and invited him in with a nod. I dropped down on the edge of my cot, and he took the camp chair opposite, crossed his legs so that his new spurs shone in the yellow glare of the lamp, and lit a cigarette. The hand holding the match trembled slightly when he bent over to give me a light. I suddenly remembered the man with the bald spot and asked:

"Your friend? Was he sent up here too?"

He dropped his eyes from my face and spoke with a great effect of gloom and solemnity, as one might mention the death of a close relative.

"Oh, no," he said. "Oh, no. He went to the heavies at Angers. We've lost each other completely."

"Well," I began, and paused. I was about to offer him consolation, and it suddenly occurred to me that the occasion hardly demanded it. His friend wasn't dead, but had gone to the heavy artillery. He brightened visibly under my glance, and murmured something about "the change having done him worlds of good."

"Changes are always stimulating, don't you think?"

He spoke shyly, with a kind of fatuous eagerness

as though very anxious that I should back him up in this important point.

"No doubt," I murmured. "No doubt."

There was a moment of silence while he continued gazing eagerly at me, and then I asked:

"And how did you manage with the mathematics?"

He was glancing straight at me. His eyes shifted suddenly, and there was the slightest touch of swagger in his voice.

"I had a pull," he said, "an awful pull. I got to know the section leader pretty well. He thought a whole lot of me."

"Which one?" I asked.

"Hervey. He's crazy about music. We clubbed around together the last three weeks, just the three of us. He asked me to run up to Paris with him before coming here. He has all sorts of interesting friends there."

"Did you get there?" I asked.

"Just for the night. Shaw wouldn't come with us."

"Oh," I said. "Your friend who went to the heavies?"

He nodded solemnly, blushing. There was a curious soft smile on his lips.

"He talked to me about duty and that sort of thing. He didn't think my mother would like Hervey's friends in Paris." He paused with an air of profound innocence. "It was really funny. I think he was jealous."

"Jealous?"

"Of Hervey," he said.

I stared at him. He ran his hand through his curls, threw his head back and gazed with an expression of forced thoughtfulness up at the ceiling. It suddenly occurred to me that I didn't know whether I was talking to a boy or a girl. Perhaps a little of both. I asked, finally:

"And how did you manage the Paris trip?"

He continued, staring up at the ceiling:

"Oh, Hervey knows the ropes."

"And so you ditched your other friend?"

He dropped his gaze to my face, moving his head from side to side and speaking with gentle solemnity.

"Oh, no," he said. "Oh, no. It was the way he acted. He left without even saying good-bye."

I remembered the faithful hang-dog expression of the pale man with the bald spot. It must have been pathetic. I was beginning to be amused again.

"How did you manage with the M.P.'s?" I asked.

"Oh, that was simple enough. We took the wrong train, that was all. We got to Paris in the evening, and they couldn't send us out until the next morning. Hervey stayed on."

"Absent without leave?" I asked.

He nodded, his eyes shifting from my face again.

"He knows all the tricks. He's spent every weekend in Paris since the school opened."

"And so you had one glorious bust," I said. "Wine, women and everything."

He spoke rather hastily.

"Oh, no. No women. They bore Hervey to death. Just men. It was at a British staff officer's place. I've never seen such rooms." He sighed. "It was like Heaven."

"Oh," I said. "Like Heaven."

"We talked," he said. "I've never heard such talk. They were all people who had done things. There were two or three young Frenchmen. It was like a dream. I never knew where I was, you know." He settled down on his elbow on my cot and spoke dreamily. "To get into that wonderful place . . . there were no lights in the streets. Cabs and people coming and going in the dead of night, like an earthquake. Just the loom of great buildings and

the trees. Hervey told the driver something and he went into all sorts of crooked streets. And then to rub your eyes and stand in that wonderful room. Everyone was so kind to me. We talked about painting, you know, and art. There was a chap there from the American embassy, and some other important people. They wouldn't tell me their names. It was just like a big family. Hervey played, and the British chap sang divinely. They wanted me to stay over, and made me promise to come back again. They told me I was leaving before the party really began." He ran his hand through his hair again. There was a pause, and then his voice ran on. "I wrote mother all about it, coming down on the train today. She'll be awfully pleased."

"Pleased?" I asked.

"To know that there are the right kind of people in the army after all. We worried about that, you see."

"And doesn't she ever worry about you?"

His smile was slightly crooked, as though her memory were rather overpowering.

"Oh, no, we had an understanding—" He checked himself suddenly and flushed, as though aware for the first time that he was talking to a

stranger. "I mean we both decided after the Germans shelled Rheims that I must fight."

I rose, stuffed my hands in my pockets and strolled to the window. It was twilight outside. The ghost of the sunset hovered over the hills to the west of the camp, and the stone tower of an old mill with dismantled arms was projected against the ashen sky like a skeleton leaf on a snowbank.

"I see," I said: "a fight to save civilization."

His face was quite flushed with his sincerity. . . . Knots of men were standing together or drifting idly here and there over the hilltop, like phantoms bound together by the disconsolate fetters of a deadly boredom. Light streamed from the doorway of the regimental headquarters, across from the mess shack. The adjutant went up the steps two at a time waving a long yellow envelope in his hand, and a moment later Colonel Sanderson followed at his nervous, mincing gait, swinging his slender riding crop from its silver handle.

The truck drew up before the door outside in a pandemonium of rattles and backfires. I glanced at my wrist watch. A voice sang out from the corridor:

"Hey, Crawford, if you're coming—"

He glanced up at me from the cot.

"Oh," he said, "you're going. Are you going to town?"

I reached up to the peg to get my cap. When I glanced around at him he was gazing at me with sort of a stricken and childish eagerness. It was very much the look of a small boy who wants to be taken for a ride but is too polite to say so. I murmured:

"You'll have to report, you know."

The truck began to sputter furiously. The same voice, this time from outside, sang out again:

"Hey, Crawford, for God's sake—"

The boy was still gazing up at me.

"I have reported, you see." He glanced around uneasily. "I'd like to get out of this hole for an hour."

It didn't occur to me to reply that he had just gotten into it. I was feeling profoundly irritated.

"Come ahead," I said.

His face brightened. He followed at my shoulder like a pleased and obedient child. We caught the tailboard as the truck lurched heavily forward, down the hill.

He talked all the way going in about his new friends and his enthusiasms. It was rather discon-

certing. Every time we hit a bump, the chains of the tailboard rattled against the sides, the heavy vehicle lurched and groaned, and his voice rose higher. Cromer, who was going in with me, sat hunched forward on the bench, staring at the floor, gazing now and then at the boy with the air of a person trying to be decent against his own better inclinations. The boy had nodded at him when I introduced them, and then averted his shoulder with a very polite air of distaste. His late experiences appeared to have given him an amazing confidence. He had been initiated into a better order of things. He had met people who spoke his own language and understood him, not one person, but several, with the assurance that there were many more. He was not so cut off from "decent" things as he had expected to be. He had met real artists, musicians, painters, the kind of people he had dreamed all his life of meeting. He would have been a little nervous if he had known beforehand what important people they were, but they had received him, so to speak, with open arms. They were seated in a group around the piano when he had entered timidly behind Hervey, and they had all looked up at Hervey rather curiously. Then the host—he was very distinguished with a clipped

moustache, in evening dress, no uniforms,—had come over and whispered with Hervey for awhile. After that everything was all right. He had been introduced. Everyone smiled at him courteously. Hervey kept very close beside him all night. Once in awhile the group would split and two or three would wander off together and then come back. One chap—he looked like a German, with clipped black hair and a monocle—an Alsatian, someone told him, in the secret service, came over and sat down beside him on the divan with its gold brocade cushions. He was immensely entertaining and had seen all the El Grecos in Spain and talked about the Prado, bullfights and the Alhambra. One had never really lived, he said, until one had been to Spain. . . . He told him how bullfighting was really a religious survival with its beginnings before the dawn of history in the island of Crete, and then linked up everything with a talk on the art and history of Spain. . . . Suddenly he stopped, squirmed around in his seat, fixed the monocle in his eye and studied the boy's face so intently that he blushed. There was something —he didn't know—but he had felt "awfully uncomfortable," just for a moment. The eye behind the monocle bored through him like a gimlet,

and the man suddenly made "an awfully funny remark." Then Hervey had come over rather quickly, and the Alsatian chap had pleaded with him not to go. He didn't want to go. But of course it was better to. He didn't want to outstay his welcome. The Alsatian had whispered in his ear imploringly while Hervey was taking him off. There was quite a commotion in one of the other rooms, figures swaying drunkenly in a haze of tobacco smoke, and a thin boy with a painted face and small, blank, expressionless eyes was standing in the doorway, his shoulders shaking with laughter. But his host had been so correct and charming. He was quite young and had the most beautiful manners. He stood very erect near the door while he was taking his leave, smiling in the most courteous manner imaginable. . . .

The truck roared and the chains rattled, and in the darkness of the confined space under the tarpaulin roof, his hands went on making gestures. I gathered that the Alsatian with the monocle had tried to follow them and had fallen down the stairs. Then there had been a quarrel between Hervey and the Alsatian in the darkness outside, while they were getting into the taxicab that was to take him to the station and the early train for

Tours, and finally they had all gotten in and gone off to the station together where they had several coffees and cognacs and everything was settled and happy again in the grey dawn. And the Alsatian chap had made him promise to call on him and look at some priceless etchings he had been collecting, the next time he could make his way to Paris. He hoped it would be very soon. Hervey had pressed his hand and given him three hundred francs when they parted. He hadn't wanted to take it, but he was quite broke, and of course he could pay it back when he received his first officer's pay. It had been, I gathered, an altogether thrilling experience and one of which his mother would have definitely approved. It had given him so many things to think over and write home about. He laid his hand on my arm confidingly. Cromer, beside me, murmured, "What the Hell," and turned to stare back. The tarpaulin roof framed an arc of the still luminous evening sky. One wheel slipped into a hole, and the ragged top of a brown hill, with the shapes of a grey stone house and barn huddled together in the shadows, as though for protection, tilted against the opening and swung around again as we started to clatter down the hill toward the town. The boy's

voice was drowned in the rattle of the wheels over the cobbles. His small hand rested confidingly on my arm in the darkness, like a woman's. Very apparently he needed something to cling to. It wasn't an altogether pleasing prospect. There was trouble ahead for him. He had been having a very good time in France and that was about all as far as I could make out. He had passed his examinations at the school and gotten his commission with his section leader's connivance. And he was rather proud of it. He had smiled on the right people wistfully, and they had patted him. He murmured in my ear his confident hope that he would be assigned to my battery. "We could be all kinds of good friends." I began to feel uncomfortable sitting beside him in the darkness as though I were betraying his fatuous confidence by the aversion it aroused in me. And the impression he had given me was not altogether pleasant. He was quite willing to trade on his wits. He was as vain as a young rooster in his new boots and spurs. We slid down noisily between the blank walls of shuttered houses, rounded a corner where the arc light showed the foliage of trees massed in a tunnel overhead and lurched into the square. There were a few blue uniforms and many olive drab ones scat-

tered through the *terrasses* of the cafés that framed the clean, cobbled space, tilted slightly with a sharp incline at the further side where the roofs of the houses, clambering steeply one above the other, seemed ready to topple over and pour down on us in the darkness.

Cromer deserted us abruptly with a mere nod of farewell, as soon as we clambered down from the truck. I avoided the brightly lighted and crowded cafés of the square with a deliberate reluctance toward committing myself to their crowded noisiness in the boy's company and an unpleasant memory of those scenes I had observed him enacting back in the cafés of Saumur.

We turned into a narrow cobbled street, between the shuttered fronts of small stores and little wine shops whose doors opened with the tinkle of a bell. Inside, heavy men sat silently in the corners drinking their thimblefuls of brandy, and an odour of wine, dirt and sawdust came out. We walked along the quays where the masts of the fishing boats bristled in dark confusion and crossed the canal by the causeway. The tide receding, had exposed a stretch of muddy bottom and the slimy stone underwalls, with weeds stirring in a ripple

of ink-black water. The breath of the ocean drove up the bay under the starlight, picking up the smell of tar and decaying fish from the sagging wharves in the outer harbour. I had some kind of a mixed and absurd notion that if I walked far enough and hard enough, he would detach himself from me, tired out. I accelerated my stride grimly. And his soft-voiced chatter persisted.

He wanted to know if I had found out as yet "the true soul of Brittany." He was always on the look-out, so he assured me, for "the true soul" of a place. And Brittany, the very name was poetic! It was 'wrapped up in his mind with the Arthurian legends.' He hoped some day to get a long leave and just stroll through the country with a pack on his back, talking to the peasants, the "real people of the soil," like a wandering minstrel. He felt that "with a little leisure and time to observe," he could begin writing poetry immediately. He was delighted—as a fellow-craftsman, of course,—to find out that I had for many years worked on a newspaper and he wondered if he had not sensed something of this in the instinct that had singled me out to him even back there at Saumur. He had watched me, when he was sure I wasn't watching him and had been struck by my slight air of, what

should he call it—detachment, perhaps. He had seen me reading a book one day—and, of course, in the army, you couldn't help noticing things of this sort. . . .

I stared at him. He had drunk in impressions until his head was reeling and he was quite dizzy. For all his connexion with the army, the dust and bitterness of the routine ahead of him, with the new uniform he was wearing with a little swagger, he might just as well have been a casual tourist bound on a self-absorbed and romantic pilgrimage. And mixed in with every other impression that he gave me that night was the slight distrust that had been invoked in me the first time his over-eager stare had wavered from my face while we were talking together in my room at camp. It was a suspicion that instead of knowing too little of life, he had begun in devious and tortuous ways to know too much. It was very peculiar. I could not quite fathom it.

We crossed the causeway again, and the town, massed on its hill, rose steeply, gloomily above us. He proposed a drink "before we return." We turned into a dingy little bar smelling of herring and stale beer, crowded with fishermen. He glanced around the little room while we sat and drank,

with shy eyes. 'It was all too perfect that he should have found me at once, this way. He always recognized the sort of people that he could be friends with at first glance. It had been the same way with Shaw and Hervey, and of course, with those interesting and clever people at Paris!'

He was skating on thin ice. I sensed it in the wavering of his glance. Perhaps there was something about that Paris evening that his mother wouldn't have approved of after all. And all the time those large eyes in that too delicate face smiled at me softly, confidingly. I rose abruptly, and dropped a two franc piece on the dirty counter. A large hand with broken nails clutched at it and swept it into a dirty apron. I glanced at my wrist-watch and murmured something about an immediate appointment.

He was very silent as we walked together up the hill toward the square. The truck, waiting with its engine sputtering under the glare of an arc light was already half filled. He stood for a moment on the curb as though reluctant to detach himself from me. I murmured a curt "good-night" and started to turn away. I felt a hand plucking at my sleeve and in a moment he had seized my left hand and squeezed it convulsively.

V

JULY PASSED INTO AUGUST AND WEEKS WENT by without a drop of rain. The tar paper on the stable roofs melted into viscous puddles that threw back the sun rays; the cracker-tin shacks turned into ovens, sizzling with the drone of flies. The heat waves shimmered over the drab undulations of the firing range where we went for practice every day; and the mirage opened up wide vistas of the ocean, tilted above the land, ready to pour in on it with fragments of uprooted shore line, a white cliff, a copse of pine, a village with a church spire, floating in mid-air. Dust rose from the roads and the parade ground and the wind, catching it, evened it out and sifted it over the encampment like a mist. The sunset grew and

flamed and died on the hills to the west and the thin glamour of band music drifted everywhere with the first long shadows of twilight.

There were rumours that we were going to the front at once. These rumours were denied but my mess sergeant, a Corsican with glittering black eyes, an olive skin and fierce, outstanding moustaches, made out his will which I witnessed with due solemnity and some amazement to note that he had been in the service for thirty years and had bought building plots in San Antonio worth sixty thousand dollars.

The mean, bare writing room in the Y. M. C. A. hut gave off in the evening a sound as of a swarm of bees in great agitation. Here were men in their olive drab shirt-sleeves with their elbows planted squarely on the inky plank table, pouring themselves out perspiringly to their sweethearts, telling amazing tales of perils endured and romantic dangers still to be encountered. Some of these letters were pathetic; others had a hard dime-novel atmosphere about them, a sort of dismal swagger; and some enclosed fragments of verse expressing the sentiment that though the writer might soon be beneath the sod, still he hoped never to be forgotten.

In the meantime, the Sanderson dinner ritual was observed each night in our mess shack with its usual flawless and uneasy solemnity. The Colonel was plainly nervous. In between his insulting stares, he took off his glasses and wiped them. This was a new symptom. The corpse was coming to life. He was also, as I learned from the adjutant, "badly out of touch with things." There was no reasonable certainty, probably, that if he were left to his own devices with a difficult problem of attack or defence, he might not give the order to fire in the wrong direction. He could not, it seems, read a map. There were other shortcomings, so I was informed, in matters of mathematics and firing tables. But this was the main one. He disliked maps—didn't altogether trust them. What he did trust was difficult to discover. It certainly was not himself. It was probably his capacity for making the rest of us uneasy, frightening us into a sort of acceptance of all that we found occasion to distrust in our turn. His pale, stealthy ubiquitousness increased to amazing proportions. Hitherto he had never appeared on the drill grounds until afternoon, unless a visit from the brigade was anticipated, but now he arose before dawn and surprised us unpleasantly at reveille, like an uneasy and

altogether unhealthy emanation of the morning mists. It was no expression of over-zealousness, but a consequence of insomnia. He was not sleeping at night. He walked up and down in his room like a cat, restless before nocturnal adventure. In the meantime, the feeling as of a cold hand clamped around the backs of our necks during the evening mess hall scene and after, increased.

Something, of course, was wrong with him. I had no time to speculate as to what this might be except on the occasions when the fat regimental doctor favoured me with an hour or two of his morbid apprehensions. His glooms were of the pronounced variety that made him talk in his sleep, and since he was an addict to the "new" psychology, I suggested he give his Freud a rest for a change. He had a theory that the war would drive everyone crazy and when he wasn't busy with the flies he went around trying to find lunatics. The night after the boy's arrival he sat on the edge of my cot in his spotty uniform, his round, fat, solemn face flushed and perspiring, the dusty hair covering the bald spot rumpled, for all the world like a frowsy stuffed owl in a country dentist's parlour, and regaled me with tales of mental breakdowns at the hospital. . . . Would I believe

it, one of the cooks over at C Battery, a quiet, inoffensive chap, had gone off his head and chased the mess sergeant out of the kitchen with the meat knife. I was annoyed and wanted to sleep so I said of course I would believe it. I knew the C Battery mess sergeant and I was surprised it hadn't happened long ago. This took him aback, and he described a number of other cases, ending up on the usual gloomy note to the effect that the war meant a total breakdown of civilization as we knew it. I told him I didn't think much of civilization as we knew it. After fifteen years getting a living on a New York newspaper brotherly love slogans meant no more to me in my sober moments than the Sunday Supplement antics of the elder Rockefeller dispensing dimes to newsboys. I doubted if it were any more civilized to cut a man's throat on the stock exchange than to bayonet him in Flanders. In one case the widow got the insurance; in the other she got a nervous wreck. Moreover, I had known any number of men who had jumped at the war to get away from the civilizing influences of their families and to deny this was hypocrisy of the most superficial sort. He said sourly:

"That's pretty stale stuff to be palming off as original."

I asked if he had anything more original to offer. He shrugged. "The Colonel,—now there was an original. . . ."

"He's psychological," he said.

"What the Hell?" I murmured. He blinked at me angrily and flushed. "Did you get that out of the book you've been reading?" I asked. He paused, confused.

"Young Brown . . ." he began.

"What about young Brown?" I asked.

"I thought maybe you might have noticed . . . he always picks on the young ones."

I sat up in bed profoundly amused at his seriousness.

"Now that's a devil of a thing to say, isn't it?" I said severely.

He looked uncomfortable.

"You don't read Freud?" he asked.

"No," I said, "I like Hans Anderson."

He eyed me through his glasses with positive hatred and then switched the topic back to the clash of war and civilization. I said that in my humble opinion there was no clash at all but only a necessary reaction. Look at the way men live in cities, piled up in vertical layers like playing cards at night, flowing here and there in horizontal lay-

ers, above ground and below by day, and the devil take the million hindmost. He declared that I was arguing beside the point but I said not at all. I was charmed with the flow of my own words and kept right on. Civilization was all right until you came to figure it out in black and white and then what had you that the caveman hadn't? I asked if he had ever stood and watched the crowd in a railway terminal during the commuter's rush hour. It was exactly like watching a mass of lead shot rolling about on a board. In the morning the board was tilted from the suburban side, and all the little lead pellets rolled into the city; in the evening it was tilted the other way and they all rolled out again. He said he supposed I thought I was quite funny, and I told him it was not funny at all. The irony behind all this was too implicit. When some first-rate crime got into the papers, when some "original"—to use his own expression—tried beyond endurance, cut short the family bickerings with the gas or hatchet, the crowd entertained themselves for a matter of months during the trial and then instead of voting the criminal a vaudeville entertainer's salary, burned him alive in the electric chair. "Greasing the griddle," the jocular jailers called it. Human nature didn't amount to

much if you took it at all seriously. Look at the way the lady Red Cross workers had dived into the shambles of hatred, making up their own slogans as they went along. Hating was a paying profession for the dollar-a-year men, and why not be decently honest about it all? . . . I hoped he would get out, and he did. It was one way of relieving the monotony of the oppressive days and the cold tension of those evening mess hall scenes.

And then one night toward the middle of that sultry month of anticipations, within a fortnight of the boy's arrival, the Sanderson dinner ritual was rudely and startlingly shattered. Looking back on it now it seems theatrical and absurd. But at the time the effect was shocking. And my young friend's troubles for the rest of the war were definitely, irrevocably, announced.

I had talked with him, dismissed him, avoided him; and he kept on dogging my footsteps after drill hours like an indecisive shadow. Occasionally he amused me, but after his recent confidences my feeling of aversion toward his more intimate gestures had grown. He confined his conversations at mess to me in a pointed manner that made me feel uncomfortable; he sat in my room after tattoo,

smoking. He resented intrusions. When anyone else came in, he rose and left the room stiffly. I hadn't the remotest conception of what was going on in his mind, but I observed the effect of his schoolgirl mannerisms on the men around him. Someone, I considered, was going to haul off in the near future and hit him with a brick.

And he had been acting, so I considered, rather peculiarly all week. By day he had given me an impression of flushed and winged eagerness, anxious to justify itself, occasionally tripping over its own toes. Once—it was on the firing range, I think—he spoke of the solemn feeling, "almost amounting to awe" that the thought of going to the front gave him. It would be, he considered, a great spiritual adventure. He had been reading Rupert Brooke—he called him a "fellow craftsman," the title he had honoured me with during our first evening together—and had been "immensely impressed." He had also read John Masefield's "Gallipoli." The war, I perceived, was largely a literary phenomenon. He hoped to "slip away" before we went and say good-bye to his new friends in Paris, and he had written a poem, a special poem, which he was going to entrust "to the archives of the regiment" to be sent to his mother if anything

happened to him. He did not want his body sent back, but he had hung around his neck a little oilskin bag in which a lock of his own hair and some of his mother's were mingled, and this he wished sent home to her. She would understand it "as a talisman." I stared at him. I was too busy for his foolishness at the time. The influenza epidemic had hit us hard, and the hospital shacks, built as close as possible to a swamp in the lowest part of the camp, were filled to overflowing. The somnolent, sickening strains of "The Dead March" drifted in from the quarter every evening before retreat as the pine coffins were hoisted up the hill to the cemetery. Under the circumstances, his peculiar and bright-eyed enthusiasms merely depressed me, like the droning of a fly. At night he sat up until long after taps, writing, writing, to that adored and unworldly person, who had brought him up in a house of shadows and tended his growing spirit so thoughtfully.

When he jumped up from the table that August evening, the lukewarm coffee from his overturned cup ran out into a mess of jam and dead flies in a tin plate, and the live ones rose in an angry swarm. I moved aside on the bench to prevent the brown fluid from running over on my lap. He brushed

into the waiter emerging from the kitchen with a mess of stew in a tub like a laundry boiler. He walked like an animated wax figure, very erect, leaning, as it were, backward, stepping with an absurd stiffness as though he were walking on eggs. At the door he turned his head just once. His face was white, his lips sealed in an expression of childish defiance, directed squarely at Colonel Sanderson. In a perfect silence, he slammed the outer door with a jolt that tore off a corner of the rusty mosquito bar and left it hanging.

VI

IT WAS A SLIGHT BIT OF THEATRICALISM. ANYwhere else it would have been ridiculous.

The fat doctor opposite me sat rigid, with his fork half-way to his mouth, and then dropped it to his plate as though he had lost his appetite. Two blond young lieutenants of D battery further along the table sat with their eyes glued to a window straight ahead, as though on parade, one very pale, the other blushing. Major Gail alone went on mechanically stirring his coffee and raising the cup to his lips, and there was in the natural gesture something unnatural like a sneering commentary on our nervous timidity. And Colonel Sanderson at the head of the table sat stiffly in

his chair, bending forward slightly, the top of his bald head shining in the smoky lamplight. His eyes were fixed on the vacant place where the boy had been sitting as if they were trying to bring into focus the full enormity of the offence they had witnessed. His mouth was still open on the sarcastic remark that had made the young man jump like a jack-in-the-box when the lid is unsprung. He may have closed it before the meal was finished. I don't know, because I never looked up from my plate. My attention had been wandering and I hadn't overheard the remark that had provoked such unexpected and calamitous results. It was not until the doctor puffed into me as I was walking out of the door that I saw a gleam of light on the mystery. He walked down the hill beside me and seemed very agitated.

Twilight had spread over the grim harshness of the landscape a haze of silver-grey through which the profusion of shacks and storehouses appeared in half tones. He flipped out a stubby arm, like a short fin, toward me, and inquired rather hoarsely if I'd "ever heard of such a thing."

"What next, I wonder?"

He peered through horn-rimmed spectacles anxiously at me. I had no reply to offer, and he went

on, daubing at his forehead with a cotton handkerchief.

"Phew, it's hot. Quite took my appetite away. I couldn't eat a thing tonight. Perhaps you noticed."

"Yes, and the flies," I murmured, irrelevantly.

He started.

"The flies—yes, of course. We're getting some new stuff in cans." He nodded, as though getting stuff in cans were quite unique to army life, and went on to ask me if I'd "ever seen anything like the way that young feller jumped."

"This new bunch from school look like a bunch of misfits," he said. "Like—like tailor's hand-me-downs or something."

I said that I did not know what tailor's hand-me-downs were, and that I was "from school" myself.

"Oh, you," he said, apologetically. "Of course that's different. You've outgrown your marbles." He gestured vaguely, and went on: "That kid must be crazy. Po'try. Of all things to get nervy about —a book of poems."

He pronounced it "po'mes," and went on to explain for my benefit when I told him that I hadn't overheard the colonel's remark that it had concerned a small volume of something or other that

he—the colonel—had picked up from the boy's cot while strolling through officer's quarters during the afternoon.

"A book . . ." I murmured.

"Oh, yes," he went on, 'The colonel had brought the book with him to mess. It was a small book, morocco bound, and the remark he had made was, he supposed, quite funny. At least it was nothing out of the ordinary.'

"What made him jump up, then?" I asked, irritably.

He cleared his throat and adjusted his spectacles as though he were about to pronounce a diagnosis after the examination of a patient.

"Well," he began, and checked himself, turning his head sharply, as a fatigue detail in overalls tramped despondently past us up the hill. 'This new crew from the school wasn't up to much anyway, in his estimation. You couldn't exactly blame the colonel for objecting to an officer reading trash —that is you couldn't blame him technically. Someone had caught that same boy marching a detail of men head on into a pile of timber during the morning, having forgotten some command or other at the last moment . . . imagine trusting

him with a firing section. The infantry would be back on us with bayonets.'

"Dreamy sort," he went on. "Got a few cases like him down at the hospital. Say they're sick. Sick of what? Nothing wrong with them. Homesick. Ha, ha, isn't that good?"

His round face was contorted with forced laughter, and he rolled his eyes. He checked himself suddenly, and then went on after a moment of silence.

"Kids like that. Nerves . . . Bing! Then it's all over."

"What's all over?" I demanded.

"Them," he said. "Them. Get 'em down once, and they're like a horse with the blind staggers. They don't want to get up. That's my idea of it."

He blinked again, as though uncertain of my intentions.

"Psychologically speaking, of course," he went on in a murmur. "Tied up to their mother's apron strings, then suddenly chucked out on their own. That kid, Jameson, came from your outfit, I think."

"Well," I said.

"Go down and look at him tied to his bed."

"With apron strings?" I murmured.

"Don't kid about it," he said. "Don't kid."

I stared at him startled more at the tone of his voice than his words. He had screwed his face up into a fierce expression. His lips were trembling.

We stopped at a crossing to wait for a line of trucks to roar past over the rutted road. A cloud of dust spread over us and hung, thick as an evil fog-bank in the already oppressive air. He hooked his thumbs under his Sam Browne belt and shouted to make himself heard above the uproar.

"Colonel never forgets anything, you'll see. . . . Idea of reading po'try in the army. Still, there ought to be a limit to the things he can pick on us about, don't you think?"

He had cheered up again.

"You'd better watch out he doesn't get some of that new stuff in cans on his clothes," I shouted. "He'll be picking on you if he does."

He started, blinked, and murmured something about 'new cases' at the hospital; then turned off to leave me. The afterglow still lingered over the scorched brown hills to the west. The street between the gloomy stare of the unpainted shacks was quite deserted. He walked along hurriedly, and

a cloud of dust trailed after him to mark his progress toward the darker twilight of the valley.

A mere excess of prudence kept me from looking the boy up that night. There was an element of pity mixed in with my feeling of distrust of him at this time. I don't know what I could have done—warned him, perhaps, that with Colonel Sanderson the accuracy of his department would outweigh any such inaccuracies of knowledge as were manifest in marching details of men headlong into piles of timber. After all, those nightly sarcasms were explicable enough in the light of the Colonel's startling and ingenuous ignorance of his own business. But I had no warning then that the matter was at all serious. The young man had acted like a young jackass, and I could console myself with the thought that I had expected something like this all along. I was uneasy. There was something about the night; a sultriness that clogged up the sensibilities. The heat seemed to press into the pores of your skin, and the low hills, shutting out the breath of the ocean, rose in the darkness like the waves of a dead sea, transfixed forever in the terrible coma of a nightmare. The wrack and exhaustion of bitter, monotonous days and sleepless

nights; of that feeling, on top of it all, of having a cold hand clamped around the back of your neck, pressed in on all sides, palpable, mystifying in its effects on your nervous system. I had the sense that was all too common in those days of being isolated with my own loneliness. For five thousand men within the circle of these dark hills every familiar landmark of life had vanished suddenly, mysteriously, and on the unaccustomed sea where they now floated, like straws blown together, the horizon met on every side in the shadow of the enigmatic, the conjectural, the foreboding. That horizon might be death; and life ran out to meet it along the surface of the flat grey desert of monotony that edged us in. It did no good to think. . . . An abandoned truck, belonging to the French who had preceded us in the camp, had fallen over on its side in a ditch beside the road. In the darkness that was gathering it looked like some monster that had taken a frantic lunge and died with its legs in the air. I avoided it unconsciously, making a long circuit through the sand to get out of its way—and then catching myself in an absurdity, turned off sharply toward my own battery barracks. Men were lounging up from mess, banging their mess kits about, talking in low tones,

and their voices stole out dead and flat, without lift or purpose, through the grey darkness. I reflected that in the peace of my orderly room where a bundle of papers from home awaited me, I might be able to forget myself—and the boy. I wasn't going to encourage any more trouble or confidences by going around to see him that evening. The sight of the battery clerk, perched at a wooden desk in his little cubbyhole, with his sharp nose deep in a pile of ink-smeared service records comforted me. What could I have done for him, anyway? Warned him to be careful, careful, careful; watch his step, keep in time with the rest of us. And he had been out of time with the world from the day he was born.

I opened a pack of brown rotogravures, and stared at my native land gone joyously hysterical with the brand new war toy that the dollar-a-year men were sharing with the editorial writers, the clergy and the lady patriots, and reflected that any common sense advice would be bound to miss the mark anyway. This was probably, as the doctor had foreboded, a case of nerves. In any event, common sense was probably the last thing that concerned the boy. I searched my memory carefully to recall a single sensible remark from him,

and gave it up at once as hopeless. I recalled his quest of "the true soul of Brittany." I remembered that he had written a poem which he was going to entrust "to the regimental archives" to be sent to his mother in case he were killed, and the lock of his hair which would serve as a "talisman." I remembered his conversations in the cafés of Saumur with the friend he had so shockingly deserted, the bald man who carried a book by a man in Adyar who had had or was about to have revelations. This was another case of a book. "Po'mes," the doctor had said. I had never considered the problem of the correct approach to young visionaries whose mothers had decided that they must fight because the Germans had shelled Rheims. I turned over the pages of my rotogravure, and the array of empty faces, gesturing, smiling, speaking from platforms, pinning labels on lapels on Fifth Avenue, peeping out from behind flower stalls at railway terminals, hit me like the blatant cacophonies of a brass band at a picnic. This was the war. My clerk at the desk groaned now and then and ran his left hand through his close-cropped blond hair. I noticed that the end of his nose was inky . . . He needed to get his feet on the ground, that other youngster did. And do what with them when he

got them there? There was nothing to show me in the rotogravures. In the headlines, back of them, it announced that Bishop Brock Preaches Brilliant War Sermon. I threw the papers down, the clerk jumped in his seat, slid his pale eyes around at me, and dug his pen into the inkwell furiously.

I had nothing to go on. Not until the next day at any rate, when the boy was put under arrest, disgraced. And then I was roped into his confidence by a mere trick of his nerves. The pretext for that arrest was shallow enough, in all conscience, to justify the worst of the doctor's forebodings. The colonel had materialized unexpectedly, at the horselines, while the boy was supposed to be superintending the grooming. Perhaps he was too frightened to call the drivers to attention. Perhaps he was off on some dream on his own account. But the effect of his disgrace struck me as remarkable.

It was late in the afternoon of the day after his arrest, and I had hurried up the hill from the drill ground to clean up a bit before retreat. The mushroom of a thunder cloud had appeared over the sea horizon a little earlier, had stretched and swelled out, and now hung high and impending over the brown hills to the east. The air was still

sultry, but the glare of the sun had lost its fierceness, and the still atmosphere, weighted with the threat of the storm, seemed to press down from overhead, like a layer of warm, woollen blankets. The impending break in the fierce monotony of the weather had its reflection in me in a curious sense of excitement, amounting almost to elation. It would rain! There was a greenish undertinge to the floating vapours behind the crest of the storm, and the low, rolling reverberations of the thunder crept in from the ocean with an effect of ominous stealth. A slat wagon, loaded with hay, slid past me down the hill. Three men on top were gesticulating, their faces upturned toward the coming storm. I had a vision of the hot, quivering waste around me buried under pools of water, of the zinc roofs sizzling as they gradually cooled. A little wind had picked the dust from the hilltop, and was blowing it out in swirls, like brown pennants. Near the crest of the hill, I ran into my stable sergeant emerging from the supply company office with a batch of reports in his hand. His uniform bulged at the knees and hung loose from the chest and shoulders, as though his small body had shrivelled inside of it, and wisps of lank blond hair stuck out, scarecrow fashion, from under the

rim of his peaked cap. He shifted the quid to the other side of his face and saluted.

"We're going to have rain," I shouted, excitedly.

His face took on a look of intense astonishment.

"Rain," he said. "No, where?"

I gestured behind him toward the thunder cap. His eyes sparkled. He shuffled his feet in a little caper.

"My God," he said; "so it is."

He started to run, flat-footedly, down the hill. I glanced around behind me before entering officers' quarters. Batteries were drawing into the gun parks at a trot, the grey muzzles and the harness buckles gleaming through breaks in the swirls of dust. I could hear a confusion of cries and commands, the crunch of wheels, the jangling of trace chains as teams were unhooked and driven off rapidly. There was no need for such an exhibition of hurry. It wouldn't rain for another half hour at least. I bounded up the steps two at a time. The corridor inside was dark and deserted, and most of the doors stood ajar on the small separate cells, with their narrow cots and articles of equipment hung by pegs on the wall. Opposite mine, one door was closed. The boy's, of course. It had occurred to me walking up the hill that I

would drop in on him for a moment. I knocked. A high, excited voice answered immediately. He was on his hands and knees, with his back toward me, in a very bright silk dressing gown, bending over his bedding roll, packing it carefully.

He had turned his head sharply on my entrance, straightening a little, but not rising from his knees. The dressing gown, falling in folds about his figure, gave it the appearance of an idol cut in an attitude of repose. His face was silhouetted sharply against the light from the open window. It seemed to have grown thin, to have shrunk a little overnight. His eyes slid over his shoulder to my face uneasily, and then I noticed that there was something rather frightened and defensive in his posture, as if he wished to shield his operations, whatever they were, from my observation. He said in a low voice:

"You shouldn't have come in. I was coming to say good-bye to you anyway."

I stared at him.

"Good-bye?"

He rose to his feet, pulled the dressing gown around him, and sat down gently on the edge of the cot. A few curls of hair clung to his damp forehead. His eyes were wide and fell on mine heavily, with a peculiar staring regard.

"I can't stay, of course, after he insulted me," he said.

I sat down in the single camp chair the room boasted, with my mouth open. This was stretching it beyond the remotest of my calculations. He had been insulted. He was acting just as he had done in running home from college, before the Italian trip, two years ago. And apparently it had never occurred to him that anyone would try to prevent him. He went on to inform me rather stiffly that he had thought everything out carefully and was acting as his mother would have expected him to. I could only gasp out:

"Where are you going?"

He had it all definitely settled. He was going to Paris first, "to advise" with Hervey. After that he would "probably return to America." He spoke in the tone of a young prince announcing preparations for a royal progress. It was quite easy to understand. The army—with Colonel Sanderson—hadn't lived up to his expectations. Therefore he was renouncing the army and Colonel Sanderson. It would be, I was left to gather, a lesson to the army and Colonel Sanderson. I felt my incredulity growing. A roll of thunder came over the hills in a reverberating crescendo. He turned his head,

glanced rapidly out of the window, and muttered something about "getting away before it rained."

"You're under arrest here, you know," I said. "You're not even supposed to step out of quarters."

He raised a nervous hand very slowly and deliberately, and snapped his fingers. It was a gesture of the most unnatural absurdity. His eyes, wide and fixed, kept staring into mine. It occurred to me suddenly that they were concealing a sense of horror somewhere behind them. I couldn't be sure. The room was growing darker with the approach of the storm outside.

"I don't suppose you have any idea of what you are doing," I said drily. "You shouldn't have made such an ass of yourself at table."

His eyes dodged suddenly off my face, and he began in the shrill excited voice I had grown so used to, with rapid fluttering gestures of his hands.

"They don't understand," he said. "You don't understand. No one understands anything at all here. I won't stay in a place that's so disgusting and loathsome."

"You'll have to learn to control yourself," I said.

He looked at me with eyes in which positive hatred was written.

"So you think so," he said. "About some things, yes. But not about such a thing."

"What are you talking about," I asked sharply. "Your book?"

"Yes," he said. "It was Shelley." He spoke the word with a great effect of solemnity, and waited as though to let it sink fully into me, and then went on. "Mother had written in the front of it, and it contained some of my own things. Some of my latest."

"Oh," I said. "Some of your latest."

I was beginning to dislike him positively. Here was a side to his complex character I had never seen before and never dreamed existed. He was acting like an utter lunatic, and behind it all was the disagreeable, brassy assurance he had taken on ever since that doubtful visit to Paris. He murmured something about influential friends who would protect him. He was "done" with the army, once and for all. There was the concentrated hatred of several months of wounded susceptibilities, injured feelings, trampled pride in his excessively delicate face at the moment. His eyes wavered, and he began to bite his lips. I had the impression that he was trying to keep the tears back, and turned my head sharply away. When I turned to look at him again, his face had steadied. He hadn't "joined

the colours to be insulted." He spoke loftily. I had hoped to appeal to his common sense. It suddenly occurred to me that he hadn't any. Not a shred. Instead he had tricky nerves, high and lofty ideals, noble phrases, and a mass of wounded susceptibilities, all quivering inside of him. A gust of wind from the oncoming storm picked up a handful of dust and sand from the road outside and slashed it against the upper window pane viciously. I rose, for something better to do, and closed the window. It had grown amazingly dark outside, and on the roadway I could make out a squad or two of men, racing by at double-time, all in a huddle, like sheep running for shelter.

"I was sure you would understand," he blurted out suddenly. "I—you see, there's no one else."

It was a special plea for sympathy—sympathy for his utter and incalculable lunacies. I spoke sharply.

"Did it occur to you that if you are caught, as you will be, you will be court-martialled for desertion?"

His voice was surprisingly gentle. Oh, yes, he had thought of that. There were martyrs, he supposed for "every cause." His mother had "always borne her cross like a martyr."

"What kind of cause is this?" I asked.

His answer was partially muffled in a sudden, long peal of thunder. Footsteps raced by in the corridor outside. I caught a few words in his low voice—"sacred." The book had been sacred. Colonel Sanderson had insulted "beauty." Also his mother's name had been involved in it somehow or other. The book had carried the inscription "from Catherine" on the fly-leaf. He never spoke of her, thought of her, except as "Catherine." And then to have his own poems fall into the hands of "that fiend."

"Who?" I asked, stupidly.

He turned his head away sharply.

"Colonel Sanderson." He paused and went on in a strange, weak voice. "I can't tell you how he makes me feel. I can't tell you!"

He raised his hand to his head with a slight, self-pitying gesture. I turned away from him in disgust and stared out of the window. The rain had begun to fall in large drops. I noticed that as each drop hit the ground, a little puff of dust was sprayed out. The sound on the tin roof overhead was like so many lead balls dropping on it at irregular intervals.

"Well," I said. "You had better wait until the

storm is over. You might get wet or something."

He glanced up at me with the shy, childish eagerness that I had noticed on our first night together. His eyes had quite lost their staring, horrified look.

"If I do, will you come back and talk to me?" he asked.

I turned with my hand on the door knob. It was dark. A quick ribbon of lightning, cutting through the heart of the cloud outside, picked out the objects in the bare little room for a moment. His face had quite lost its hardness, and a peculiar, soft smile wavered across his mouth. I felt the sudden weariness that a parent feels in the face of the reiterations of a tiresome and baffling child. If I encouraged him now, he would be on my hands with his intimacies, his confidences, his temperamental shortcomings, for the rest of the war. Mixed in with all my other feelings at the time, was a desire to laugh at the complete and utter absurdity of it all. And turning out of the door, I started as though I had been struck on the chest. The lights in the hall had been turned on. I had to brush by the colonel to get into my own room again. How long he had been standing there, not two yards from the boy's door, I had no means of telling.

His face was utterly expressionless. His trenchant regard fell on mine as I passed, and left the feeling, as of a cold spot, on the back of my neck. Whether he had overheard a single word of our conversation or not, I had the distinct notion that he had been listening to all of it. It was quite in accord with his habits. His overseas cap with its silver eagle perched on front, was pulled down jauntily over one bulging eye. His boots and buckles glittered. He looked like a corpse in fancy dress, propped in a doorway, with a nightcap stuck on its head to round out an effect of bravado.

It was a little too much. I hurried across to my room. A roll of thunder dropped from the throat of the storm overhead, and the lightning picked out single objects on the hilltop, a row of torn bushes, the roof of the mess shack, silhouetted against the night. I slammed the door and switched on the light. There was a feeling of repulsion mixed in with my other sensations—and on top of it all a desire to laugh. I sat on the edge of my bed, to pull off my boots, remembering the absurd words of the doctor—"Nerves . . . Bang—then it's all over." All over . . . the sooner the better . . .

The next day orders came through and we began entraining for the front.

VII

I WAS TO LOSE SIGHT OF HIM FOR UPWARD OF FIVE weeks. He was transferred from my battery shortly after our arrival at the front, and for some time I harboured the comfortable delusion that I was rid of him. His little house of cards had come tumbling. He had lost that air of ineffectual jauntiness which he had assumed ever since the Paris episode and only regained it again months later when the strange affair with the German girl, while we were with the Army of Occupation, began. In a single blow Colonel Sanderson had knocked his idol from its pedestal, held up his morocco-bound book with its picture of his mother and a lock of her hair, bound in gold mesh, as a bookmark, and his cold voice had fallen harsh and

flat across the silences of the oppressive mess hall: "You see, gentlemen, what we have here. A Shelley in the midst of us." The dream of life had ceased, and the nightmare had begun.

And of all this he could tell his mother nothing. He had her letters through whose eloquent phrases there glanced up at him the wistful smile of a martyr. The long Winter of rain when the trees in the grove seemed to bend their leafless branches under the weight of mist and darkness, had left her with the pain in her side accentuated. She longed for the time when he could fly back to her, a gallant young conqueror, a knight with his sword keened by its onslaughts against the enemies of light. She needed him, but she would not say how much. His room under the eaves stood waiting and dusted, and in a bowl on his writing desk in the room next to it she kept always fresh bouquets of the late summer roses. And often sitting there when twilight fell and the shadows glided across the lawns, she fancied she heard his footsteps, his voice that had called to her from the troubled dreams of his childhood; his voice that had grown strong and cheered her, bringing happiness in its accents, happiness in the strength of the bond between them—happiness.

We went in on the St. Mihiel sector as corps reserve and after three days' futile milling in the mud while the advance went on, pushed out over roads like swamps and struck in earnest towards the Sedan-Mézières communications. Then began the blunders, encounters, tragedies, and bitter comedies in the mess of wooded hills known as the Argonne. The enemy clung, melted, clung again in exhausted and isolated detachments in a battered, sodden wilderness that might have furnished hints for a landscape painter's nightmares. They appeared in the flank when they should have been in front; and in the rear when they should have been in the flank; the last desperate resistance of a starved and worn-out army; clawing off red chunks from the great raw divisions in olive drab pouring on by sheer weight of bewildered momentum. It was a grim comedy of errors and lost communications glazed over by the glibness of official *communiques*. Artillery choked the roads, and the exhausted infantry serpents wound off over the foggy hills ahead of them on their own unsupported and often directionless errands. Divisions gained their objectives, lost contact on their flanks; lost their staffs, while the staffs lost their heads. Meaningless names of sodden places,

churned over by the great shells, battered into the muddy fields on which they had once stood, flashed back over the wires—Varennes, Vauquois, Exermont, Cheppy, Sommerance,—and the folks at home were entertained and terrified with visions of a long final march on Berlin. The American mob in khaki flung into the weighted scales had turned the tide, and now that tide that had thinned and spread itself in France, soaked itself out in blood and rotting corpses, in wire traps and "pill-boxes," in dug-outs and trenches, behind hastily flung up barriers in the streets of villages that had ceased to exist, in the gaunt and splintered aisles of the forests where every bush spat death and thin red flames. A battalion lost itself and became famous. This was irony of a sort that it was better to overlook. Individual initiative left to itself found the American private of several degrees greater stature than his general, and the general, as a rule somewhat less intelligent than his aides. In the scramble for credit, the fact that the enemy was worn out, torn between revolution in the rear and starvation in the lines, and terribly outnumbered was entirely lost sight of. Our business was to swamp them out of their nests and lairs; our success was quite phenomenal, and so were our losses. Our particular

duty as artillery was to try and find some place where we could shoot at an enemy and not shoot at our own men, and in some cases this was not possible. Toward the last, divisions wandered around helplessly, unfed and listless, and captured each other's staffs, and only the fact that the enemy had melted away prevented a general annihilation while the Liberty drives at home became Victory drives and more names of captured towns that had lost their entity beneath the shells flashed out in the newspapers. And over all the sodden mess of confusion and explosions, of staggering advances and deadly swift encounters, of wagon-choked roads lined with their ragged dreary poplars, fell the Autumn rains, heavy, bitter and disconsolate on the fallen corpses, the litter of dismantled forests, the cold and bitter faces of those who stood to death in the dawn.

PART III

OVERSHADOWED

I

ONE NIGHT TOWARD THE CLOSE OF THE FIRST week in November, I was trying to get what comfort I could out of wet blankets on a soaking hill-side when a murmur of voices outside the gun tarpaulin that served as a tent aroused me.

Toward dusk that day we had ridden up almost on the backs of our infantry, and now in the last confusion of the advance, as disorderly as any retreat, the casual discipline of the front was disappearing. A lone German 77 that had somehow escaped the scouring of the infantry floods ahead had thrown a few shells from the flank into our picket line earlier in the evening, raising a terrible

commotion among the starved, mangy horses and killing two of the sleek little field-kitchen mules. The end of the war was drawing near and it was like the end of the world. The empty routine of slaughter was dissolving in a chaos of movement, and from Flanders to the Meuse, Victory, verminous and dejected, was crawling forward over the tossed destruction, the slag-heap hills, the nightmare forests and pitted fields of defeat.

I lay there under the tarpaulin utterly exhausted. We had been on our feet on the muddy roads, horses and men, for seventy-two hours. The communications of supply had broken down, the entire battalion was parked in a hollow, a confusion of starved horses, empty wagons and guns without ammunition enough to have staved off an attack if one had threatened. One part of my brain was dead, and another part, alive and active, rehearsed in endless monotony the weary images of the last few days and nights. I was as aware of every sound in the darkness around me as though I were listening to the instrumentation of some dismal symphony in a cold hall with the lights out. The patter of rain overhead, the stamp and scuffle of hoofs from the picket line, the occasional staccato chattering of machine guns, in quick bursts, far off,

a murmur of despondent voices from the hillside where men lay in wet holes trying to sleep. I turned, pulling the soggy blankets of my bedroll over my head. The far-off sounds diminished, and those close at hand took on a sharp emphasis. The murmuring voices drew nearer, receded. The footsteps of the two men outside sucked in the mud around my tent pegs and suddenly I heard the words . . . "Armistice . . . any day now . . . rumours." It was the voice of my senior sergeant, Greenberg, talking, and I recognized the other voice as belonging to a thin-lipped, sour-faced corporal of D battery. I started to turn over again. The footsteps drew off, and I caught at the next phrase vaguely, "Some of these little boys . . ." The voice trailed off into a cough and the footsteps drew nearer again. One of them spoke the boy's name loudly. "Darrow." And the other man muttered: "Jesus! he's . . ." His voice was stopped off by another fit of coughing and I sat up abruptly.

It was the sudden perception that I had not forgotten him in the last month or so but that I had carefully refrained from thinking about him that pricked all my faculties to an intense alertness. It was as though his high-strung and ridiculous revolt

had touched ever so faintly within me a secret spring of rebellion; as though the pity and distrust I had assured myself I felt for him had returned to me in a faintly insidious self-pity. I sat there while the footfalls splashed and sucked on the wet hill outside, and the two men paused to slap their arms across their chests vigorously. They turned, and the sergeant's voice drifted back on the wind vaguely . . . "queer egg, dam' queer," and then some remark to the effect that "he had seen funny ones in his time too."

They stopped suddenly near the head of the tent, and their voices came back like a murmured refrain to the beating of wind and of rain . . . "curly-headed son of a bitch. . . ." One of them murmured "Simon," and their voices flowed together as they walked off . . . "yeah, he was tellin' me. . . . Simon's been up with him . . ." and something about a "runner." "Beach," one of them said, or "Leach." I couldn't quite make out, but I gathered that the man was from the regimental P. C.

They turned, and the coat tails of one of them swished against the side of my tent. The corporal's voice spoke up hoarsely, very loud, as though it had been trumpeted in my ear:

"What in the name of God is the old piker up to?"

The reply of the other man was vague. I heard the words "sock in the jaw," and "Brigade." Someone, the colonel, evidently, had been getting into hot water. The other man said "No!" loudly, and paused, and one of them spat against the side of the tent. A gust of wind caught their voices, flicked off the phrases, and spattered a sheet of rain against the canvas roof above me. "Son of a bitch" one of them said again with his chin in his coat collar, and the other laughed, a strained laugh, like a bark. The gust of wind passed and the rain fell evenly. The fragments of phrases fitted themselves into a coherent pattern again.

"He's been up there two weeks overtime, Sergeant Pete was tellin' me. We ain't got but one other officer left in the battery."

They slapped their arms across their chests for a moment, and the sergeant spoke into his coat collar.

"Brown," he said. "Brown? Thought he got his back there by. . . ." His voice trailed off, and the other man cleared his throat and spat again. The rain had stopped, and I could hear a jingling of halter chains and a stamping of hoofs from the

picket line. In the silence that followed the next words reached me as distinctly as though they had been shouted at me.

"I'm tellin' you, ain't I? It wasn't the old man's fault he didn't get it on liaison. Mean to tell me you ain't heard that story?"

I caught the sergeant's murmur, evidently of dissent, for the gruff voice spoke up again immediately.

"He was standin' with the colonel when the shell came over that took off the whole third section. Grimes was the only one that wasn't touched. You know him—skinny guy with a face like a bad acorn. Well, he told me that after the smoke had cleared away, the colonel had cleared away with it. You know the way he has. Vanishin' like a conjurin' trick. Only this time he'd used his legs. Used 'em for fair. They found him head first in a hole half-way back to the echelon. He'd gone right in above the ears like one of them South African birds. There he was, glasses gone, ridin' crop gone, mud all over him. He wasn't hurt, just skeered. Brown pulled him out. Grimes sez he ducked away as soon as they saw him. Next day Brown got orders to move up with the infantry. Stayed there

'til he got killed. Two weeks without relief. Simple, ain't it?"

There was a pause. Then the sergeant said loudly:

"I'll be son-of-a-bitched. And now he's . . ."

"Keepin' that little creeping Jesus up there. Pete up at headquarters makes up the roster. Looks like this outfit was a bad place for boys, don't it?"

They took a turn around my tent, stamping, and the next phrases drifted back to me in fragments . . . "balks . . . scared to death . . . like a remount at his own shadow."

Both stopped short at the bark of a machine gun some distance off to the left in the darkness, and then started sloshing down the hill toward the picket line. I threw the blankets off, pulled on my boots, and stepped outside. It was pitch black. The cold rain, falling in large drops, seemed to be squeezed out of a damp blanket that shrouded the night overhead. The single gun had set off a chorus of others: staccato answering voices like bunches of firecrackers set off by the same fuse. The machine guns stopped as abruptly as they had begun, and I heard the patter of rain on the tent beside me, as though someone were picking up handfuls

of water and splashing it against the canvas sides. The hillside gave off a vague murmur of voices. One of the mules whose comrades had been killed set up a sudden hullabaloo of wailing, like a lost child screaming in the night, and a voice cursed the disturbance roundly. I turned away from the lines and groped my way, pitching into muddy shell holes and scrambling out again, up the hill.

I wasn't very clear in my head as to what I was doing. I wanted to find him, that was all. Perhaps I wanted to prove to myself that he was actual, that the voice I remembered, the outcries, the distorted pains were real, and not, as it were, a nightmare reflection of the wierdly disharmonious and broken dream I had been living through myself for the last five weeks. I had a vague notion also that he was lost; a premonition, perhaps, of the later actuality when I was to see how completely lost he really was, how far removed from the world of give and take, of casual sunshine, of bitter flurries and storms. It was all mixed up in my head. I had no definite idea what I was doing. I was groping ahead in my mind, just as I was groping through the night on that hillside—on all fours, for the most part of the time, groping through a bewildering shapelessness of holes and mud. I

stumbled over a soggy wet bundle, and my hand fell on a face. I could feel the nose, the eyepits and the cheekbones, and I snatched my hand away suddenly, as though it had been bitten. The flesh was decomposing and the body gave off a stench. A little further along there was another hole, and this time I ran into a pair of feet. A voice moaned something indistinguishable. Someone was trying to sleep in a puddle of water. I paused to get my wind. The rain had begun again, and the large drops were pelting the muddy hillside and plashing in the pools. The noises from the picket line behind me had dropped off. I must have come a quarter of a mile at least. Way off to the right and behind me a battery had begun firing and an insipid wrack of sound was flattened out by the rain. I ducked and fell flat on my face as a machine gun, appallingly nearby, broke into voice like a riveting machine delivering blows against armour plate. The sound was picked up, in short bursts, in chorus, to right and left of me, and silence dropped again, palpable and heavy, like a curtain at a theatre. Then the night began to babble with other voices, all around me. The hillside, the blank darkness, was alive and crawling with men like worms in so many pits. I crawled a little further

myself, and came up sharp against a pile of debris, helmets, odds and ends of equipment, rusty rifles, flung up in front of a hole, to serve as protection, and cut my knees on some barbed wire. A hoarse, irritated voice sounded from my left: "For Christ's sake, quiet down, you men. Go to sleep, can't you?" and an answering voice at my elbow, repeated in a sort of feeble whine, "Go to sleep, go to sleep; God, my feet are freezing." The feet in question were stuck out from beneath a torn piece of pup-tent erected on some sticks and rifle barrels. I stumbled, and almost knocked the flimsy contrivance over. The feet kicked at me, and the voice began to swear, very earnestly and fluently, a trifle hoarsely. I said, "What outfit's this?" and another voice to my left spoke out: "Gon' to be relieved, are we?" There was a sound of stirring and awakening. The same voice sang out, "Say, Bill, we're gon' to be relieved," and an answering voice growled "Yeah? Go to hell." The word "relief" was tumbled from mouth to mouth through the darkness in denials and affirmations: "Relief, who said relief?" "Didn't I tell you that lousy regimental runner had it straight?" "Pull yer head in, this son-of-a-bitch of an outfit's goin' to be buried here." It was as though the hillside, the night, had

been given voice and were sighing, cursing and groaning all around me. I said, "I'm from the artillery. Where's the P.C.?" And the hillside and the night groaned angrily, derisively: "Artillery, oh goddam, listen to it. It's the artillery. Where the hell were you when you were needed? O God, they've come out and got their feet wet." An indescribable jargon. The cutting voice sang out above the tumult, and I started off toward it, groping. The rain had ceased, and there was an effect of moonlight, ghastly and evanescent, somewhere behind the cloud vapours overhead. Off to the right, heavy firing had begun at intervals; long rifles, registered on one of the Meuse bridgeheads. I found him finally. . . .

He was kneeling in the muddy water of a shell hole with his arms on the brink. The faint luminosity of the clouds overhead, relieving the blank darkness of the night, showed the hillside, a black mass like a cloud looming up to meet the downpressing clouds of the storm, his form a shadow among countless shadows, his head dropped in an attitude of prayer or supplication, and his face buried in his hands. He was arguing to himself in that high-pitched voice of his, and his teeth were

chattering. His voice had picked up the curious, jargoning refrain of the voices that had subsided all around me into silence; the voices that had seemed to me like inconsequential echoes of the wind, the night and the rain. He was jabbering to himself, with his head buried in the muddy side of the shell hole, and every once in awhile his right hand slipped out from under his head, his arm described a wide arc, ending with a jerk as if he were demonstrating an important point to some phantom witness, and was jerked back again. I laid a hand on that arm, and he tore it away with a whimper, as though I had run a knife into it. He spoke without raising his head:

"Let me alone," he said. "Let me alone."

He began to cough, a hard, racking cough that shook him from head to foot, and someone spoke up from the darkness quite close at hand:

"For the love of Christ, quit the racket."

He moved away from me suddenly:

"Oh for God's sake," he said; "for God's sake."

He flung his arms out and jerked his head back so suddenly that I thought something had struck him. Then he settled back in the hole, crouching.

"I'm cold," he said. "He wants to kill me."

"What became of you yesterday?" I asked, quite at haphazard.

"I don't know." He was staring at me, and apparently without the slightest recognition. He spoke wheedlingly, with an effect of cunning, holding his head to one side. "I don't know, if you don't. And if you don't know, then he won't know either."

"Who?" I asked, stupidly.

He spoke mysteriously, as though he were taking me into a confidence.

"Sometimes I see his eyes all around me in the night. Sometimes I stand up in front of the shells and go like that—" he flung out both arms suddenly, almost knocking me over backwards. "Then they are gone."

Suddenly he began rummaging in his pocket. His jaw sagged. There was a curious leer on his face, and he frowned, as though he weren't quite sure what he was doing. He drew out some soggy bits of paper and thrust them into my hand.

"What's this?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said, "unless it's poetry."

"Whose?" I asked.

"I don't know." His voice was profoundly melancholy. "Unless it's mine."

His head fell forward again. His shoulders shook and he began whimpering like a frightened dog. It was awful. The night with its huddle of dark shapes was about as consoling as a winter graveyard. Then he began to cough. The nearby voice muttered:

"Christ! Quit it."

I stared at the boy helplessly. He kept repeating:

"I haven't done anything." His voice was a frightened moan. "He wants to kill me."

I murmured something reassuring. He staggered to his feet. I grabbed at the tails of his coat, appalled.

"They can't get me," he yelled. "They've tried. They can't get me."

I yanked him down violently. The voice of the officer who had quieted the men earlier spoke up furiously from my right.

"Who's making all that goddam fuss?"

Someone muttered.

"It's the artillery. Goin' off when they ain't needed."

A couple of forms started to crawl toward us. I managed to get him into the bottom of the hole and keep him quiet. He went to sleep suddenly,

with his arms thrown out, his head resting on his helmet.

I saw him, a solitary figure, the night the armistice was officially announced. He had come back to us from the infantry. There was no one to greet him. The story of his strangeness had spread. He had only to approach a group of men to have it gradually melt away. He was cut off, isolated.

How much of this he felt, I could not tell. I hardly recognized him. He had scraped most of the mud and dirt off. The face behind which the fires of his childish enthusiasms had burned was a mask, drawn and distorted with exhaustion, and with something else that kept his eyes heavy and fixed. His talk was a hard, brittle swagger, verging on hysteria. He had been degraded to the Supply Company parked in a litter of haymounds and clothing bales near us. I watched him marching up and down in front of his pup-tent, the single lonely figure in the whole peopled valley. Something inside of me turned over—pity. I walked over and joined him.

On the plain around us huge bonfires glowed like exotic weeds in a desolate garden. As far as the eye could reach, to right and left, rockets

curved, soared, like frantic, aroused insects shot out of an illumined hive, crossing each other's trails in their excited flight, penetrating the grey mist in challenging curves. Mess had come up on the field kitchen limber, and the driver, a raw-boned Tennessean with a thin, sarcastic face and a shapeless overseas cap like a sugar loaf, sat hunched forward on the driver's seat, spitting with great accuracy between the heads of the two mules.

The long line of men in overcoats, in muddy blouses with the buttons gone, in slickers that flapped about their knees, in ravelled puttees and muddy shoes, unshaven, with wisps of hair emerging scarecrow fashion from their woollen caps, moved slowly forward over the soggy leaves that half-covered the churned-up mud. They moved silently for the most part, with here and there a grunt or a murmur, their eyes glued to the greasy aluminum mess kits with bits of the last meal still clinging to them. The Hebrew cook worked methodically with his mysterious smile a fixture on his pale face, dipping with one ladle into the coffee can and with another into the soupy meat. The mess sergeant kept one bright black eye on the contents of the cans and the other on the length of the line slowly filing past. The mules shook

themselves in their harness, snuffled the damp leaves overhead, pawed at the earth, and suddenly one of them threw his head up and gave out the soul of his weariness and vexation in a long, gasping outcry that shattered the oppression of the gathering dusk. The mess sergeant jumped, the Tennessean spat into the bushes and prodded the animal with his foot, a thin little soldier with a wizened, nut-brown face called out:

"God aw'mighty, why'n you tie his head in a bucket!" And the boy standing beside me started and began to tremble. He collected himself in a moment. His eyes wandered off down the darkening valley where the fires made fantastic shapes of the long endless wagon parks and picket lines and the vast pyramidal sprawl of a supply dump that had begun building the day before. He spoke. He wanted me to understand that his experiences had been painful, unusual. Not a word of them must ever pass my lips! Not a word—solemnly, on my honour. His eyes clung to my face with a heavy fixity. I could only nod as you would to a frightened child. His voice dropped to a whisper. . . . 'They would talk, of course, but I mustn't believe—'

"Who?" I asked, startled.

His gesture comprehended the whole of the vast valley alive with lights and shadows, awaiting the deeper gloom of the night; the valley peopled by men in brown, as far as the eye could see, swarming thousands who had writhed and fought and killed in the soaking earth like frantic worms, and now, released from the fear of rotting for ever in that earth, were coming to life again by the warmth and glow of the great fires. His voice ran on in a whisper. 'They were all against him. Oh, he knew, he knew.' He clutched at my sleeve. 'But they couldn't get anything on him—not a thing. He had buried that revolver—'

"What revolver?" I asked, sharply.

The gleam of animal cunning in his eyes when I turned my head brought me up with a shock. It occurred to me suddenly that he had probably interpreted that unsolicited visit of mine that night of rain and gunfire as an attempt to spy on him. His face composed itself suddenly, and the gleam wavered and died in his eyes, leaving them blank, void, frightened. 'He had buried that revolver,' he gave me to understand. 'And he wouldn't have snatched it out of the hands of a dead man—only what could he do? There were 'eyes' around him, weren't there? He had to shoot, didn't he? It was

self-defence, wasn't it? There were so many bodies out there, stinking and rotting that it didn't make any difference. . . .'

I gazed at him, shaken. It never occurred to me to ask whom he had shot or why. I wanted to break the conversation off before I heard too much. I hadn't the heart to tell him that we had already been ordered into Germany as part of the Army of Occupation. I spoke of his poems, and the swagger returned to his voice. He marched up and down beside me gesticulating. By another fire figures were composing themselves in brown bundles of blankets preparing for slumber. He continued to talk at me as though he were arguing with himself. It would take him quite awhile before he could assimilate his experiences so that he could "produce something remarkable," something, I gathered, that would justify certain phases of that experience which had given his eyes their tinge of horror. He never waited for a reply. He talked at me jerkily, with quick, sudden twists of his head from side to side, every once in awhile sliding a finger into his coat collar behind and wrenching it around as though it were too tight for him. He had "figured everything out in his head." He would get a discharge in France. No doubt wires could be

pulled. There was Hervey waiting for him in Paris —and his set, that wonderful, exclusive set. He spoke of them without enthusiasm. Hervey, however, "could help him." He never even mentioned his mother.

I let him talk on. His plans were quite comprehensive. Only the thought of going home seemed to prick him to profound uneasiness. He had ceased to write to his mother. "There were so many things, so many things—" He mumbled the words, his face turned away from me, his eyes wide and staring raised toward the evening sky. So many things! Stars were appearing as the tall hills to the west drew the night down into the desolate plains and valleys around us. The rockets still soared, breaking their hearts of flame against the high immensity of the sky. . . . So many things. He gasped. His fingers, joined behind his back, were working, writhing, feverishly.

II

VARIOUS THINGS HAPPENED TO BREAK THE monotony of that dozen days' hike along the rapid Moselle, between bleak, tall hills, scrawled across with the dark lines of the winter vineyards. For one thing we were going into the unknown. Then there was talk of a march on Berlin. The regimental Y. M. C. A. man, a thoroughly unpleasant chap, with a straw moustache on a face that reminded me of an old whisk broom, assured us that we were going to take the Kaiser—just then in Holland—to London where he would be tried by a bench composed of seven international jurists. When I asked why not eight, or, for that matter, seventeen, he blinked and looked hurt.

He had it from "higher up," there were going to be seven. When I suggested that the criminal would end up on vaudeville circuit in America with an income large enough to buy back the Berlin-Bagdad Railway, he departed in an atmosphere of scorn, leaving us to work out the possibilities of the situation for ourselves. No one really cared about the Kaiser, and interest at the moment was concentrated on the schnaps.

The third day, my stable sergeant, a profane little wisp of a soldier, very efficient when sober, developed a bad case, climbed into a hayloft in the village where we made our noonday halt, lay flat on his back and shot the slate off the roof with his automatic. When the first sergeant came to reason with him, he took it to heart, whimpered, and then turned over on his side and commenced shooting indiscriminately down the ladder. I stationed a corporal behind a hogshead near the door with instructions to gather him up when his ammunition ran out, and we plodded on, leaving the lady of the farm in the courtyard, screaming. The next day the sergeant of the first section, a circumspect and reticent soldier, with a tight, silent face and gold-rimmed spectacles, staged a circus exhibition by himself in a field while the battery was passing,

rolled into a ditch and lost his saddle. Then "steps were taken" and things sobered down again. But in the meantime steam had been blown off. The despondent silences were broken. Men began to loosen their belts and grumble. The Maltese mess sergeant fought shrilly with the kitchen police during the noonday halts. Things were going back to normal.

And once I was awakened in a pitchy blackness in a cubbyhole of a bedroom at the farmhouse where I was sleeping the night out to a sound of moaning and whimpering in the room next to me. My door was pushed open, and a woman's voice, very frightened, began to ejaculate in German. I rose, pitched over a pile of very hard old apples in the corner of the room and got out into the hall where a candle, held high, showed the straying white hair and furrowed face of my peasant hostess with a patch of dingy plaster wall behind. There was no one else in the house. There were no doctors in the village. Her daughter was having a child. I held the candle in a cold sweat while the woman on the bed moaned, the old woman worked with little gasping intakes of breath, and the shadows swarmed up and down on the bedroom wall. I had been assisting Germans out of the world for

the last three months, and now I was assisting one in. Whatever the implicit irony, he didn't look like much, swaddled in a bit of dirty old blanket, when I was permitted to hold him for a moment the next morning. His red face was puckered up in a rage as though in remonstrance at the very unfairness of being dragged into a place he hadn't inspected beforehand and had no assurance he would like anyway. But the mother on the bed, with untidy blonde locks straying across her plump, pale, cheeks smiled up at me weakly. I left a hundred-mark note as a christening present, and departed with all the blessings of all the saints and a howl from the infant pursuing me. No mention was made of the father. . . .

And I managed to lose sight of the boy for the time being at least, the distance between my battery and the Supply Company being a good half mile of slow-moving column—a distance which I regarded as a safety zone and took special precautions not to diminish. I had still to speculate as to my inmost motives in going forward to find him that night of freezing rain at the front. Pity? But it wasn't as easy as that. It was rather in answer to the astonishment he evoked whenever

I sat down to think seriously about him. He was as unreal to me as a figure on a picture postcard. He didn't belong to anything or to anyone except possibly his mother, and toward her a strange reticence, almost aversion, had suddenly come into being within him. I was beginning to feel a little worried about his sanity. There was something curious, strained, unnatural in his fear of Colonel Sanderson, and the means he took to allay it were equally extraordinary. He had "seen his eyes all around him in the night." He had stood up in front of the shells and flung his arms out. He had reduced the regimental runner, Simon, a fat and pungent little Jew, to a state of nerves bordering on whimpering hysteria with his insistence on crawling out toward the wire and turning over corpses to see if any of them had the face of Colonel Sanderson. He hadn't been frightened in any of the commonly accepted definitions of the term. But the knight of his mother's dreams had vanished in the smoke and explosions, and over those fields of death and torture there had crawled a monster in his likeness. He had strutted and postured before me that night, the first of the armistice, and under his eyes as they had glanced from mine was the shadow of his self-loathing. He had

talked, and I had let him talk, but it was no longer his own voice I heard. It was an echo from the torture of his uneasiness. What lay ahead of him now? Nothing, nothing. The bright dreams of his boyhood, the high and ethereal moments, the incense of golden aspirations, tapering, rising, spiralling, and disappearing around the brow of his idols, had blown away, disappeared, and left a place of ghastly light and shadow. The sensitive hands that had stroked his mother's brow, smoothing away the wrinkles of pain, had maimed and tortured; had fumbled in their madness at rotting corpses trying to find the face of a nightmare.

To me in those first days of the long hike when I chanced to ride past him as he walked at the end of the straggling Supply Company column with his glazed eyes and glazed solemn stare fixed on the muddy road, he was like some sensitive instrument that the fingers of war had caught up for a moment and played on, and then tossed aside with broken strings. I had nothing to go on. Only the curious and uncanny instinct of watchfulness that proximity to him had aroused in me from the first. Once when I dropped out of the slow-moving column in the square of a little

hamlet, with mud and plaster walls, that seemed to have crawled up out of the river bottom and squatted to rest half-way up the slopes of the vine-yarded hills, he passed so close that I could have reached out an arm and touched him. His eyes wandered to my face and fixed themselves there for a moment but without a single gleam of greeting or recognition. I, too, was dead and gone, along with other debris of the past as far as he was concerned. Once when he was sent by Captain Ryan, his C.O., to discuss the disposition of some billets with me when our two outfits happened to be quartered together for the same night, he showed me the mask of a face, white and brittle as a plaster-cast, handed me a slip of paper on which Ryan's suggestions were written and turned on his heel and marched off without a word or a sign. There was fear in the eyes that glanced for a moment into mine, fear of the something he could not face, the remembrance of that monster shape within him that had risen, as once long ago, it had risen in the nightmares of his boyhood. He was trapped in his fear, like some small animal caught in a net, staring with bleak eyes at bleak and nameless horizons.

There was nothing to be done about it. . . . We rode on, and the grey Winter peace lay over the land, over the sombre hills that rose from the river and caught at the flying clouds of mist. The stream wound its way like a brown and sluggish serpent, overfed and drowsy, and along its banks on either side rolled the armies, on hoofs and on wheels, on tractors and tanks whose violent uproar hung in the cool, misty air like the vibrations of hammers in a quarry.

We rode on through drowsy Winter hamlets, and the lean chickens fled, cackling, behind the sagging fences; and faces, old and weary and war-wise, leaned over them and stared at us with blank and questionless eyes. We passed our nights in damp little beds like boxes and in haylofts, looming vast and empty; and in the frosty morning when we climbed down stiff and cold, old hands reached out, trembling, with cups of steaming muddy liquid that faintly resembled coffee, and old eyes consulted the "enemy faces" warily, soothingly. . . .

Once only, I spoke with the fat little doctor about the boy and then he gave me a glance commiserating my want of fine psychological understanding. He rode up beside me one day, when we

were drawing near our destination, on a nag with frost-bitten ears and a stringhalt, his elbows jerking up and down like the wings of a bantam rooster, and after a number of solemn forebodings concerning the weather, asked me if I had heard the new nickname they had for "the kid" up at headquarters. People had begun to talk of course; people who didn't go around with their heads in their overcoat pockets like—well, like some people he knew of, and he gave me a solemn and baleful glance through his heavy glasses. I said that in my estimation an overcoat pocket was as good a place for a head as I knew of these days, but I hadn't heard what they called the kid up at regimental. . . .

"Little mad Ophelia. Can you tie that? Ha, ha! Clever, aren't they? Think they're clever—like crutches."

"Where did they get that from?" I asked.

He pursed his lips, and blinked owlishly at me. "Oh, there was talk. All sorts of talk. College chaps. Shakespere, probably." He went on:

"That chap who thinks he's adjutant came up to me the other day pulling his moustache and smirking—you know the way he has. 'Well,' he says, 'how's our little Ophelia these days?' I

thought he was kidding, I was just about to say: 'Oh feel your—' He rolled his eyes and his fat face shook with forced merriment. That would have been a good one, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, splendid," I murmured. "Quite original."

He eyed me suspiciously.

"Oh, you're beginning on that, are you?"

"On what?" I asked, innocently.

"Never mind." He took a deep breath. "I got right back at him. I said: 'How's that lunatic of yours behaving?' He shut up like that."

He snapped his fingers, and pursed his lips, turning his head to stare at the grey upheaval of hills and storm clouds across the river, and then jerked the head of his nag up from the road where it had been snuffling at the ghost of an oat.

"What's up now?" I asked.

He breathed heavily.

"He's been drunk," he said; "dead drunk."

I stared at him, amused.

"No," I said. "It's incredible."

He spoke with an effect of scorn.

"Oh, you think it's funny, do you? You would, of course. Quite funny. Ha, ha. Yes." He shook himself in the saddle. "I'm all over cooties," he

said bitterly. "Crawling things. You pick 'em off. Bing! . . . they're back again."

"Just like the colonel?" I offered.

"Oh, he'll come back," he said. "Wait till he sobers up. It's ghastly. He was stiff yesterday. Like a corpse. Glassy eyes. They got me up at midnight."

"Who did?" I asked.

"That West Point feller who thinks he's adjutant."

"Well, isn't he?"

He nodded morosely. "Oh, he was adjutant, all right. He was willing to concede that point. Still, when it came to getting a man up at midnight . . . and the language he had used. . . ."

"The adjutant?" I asked.

He looked at me in ominous silence for a moment, and then asked solemnly if I was going to spend the rest of my life in the army interrupting him. It threw him quite off his train of thought. If it had been the adjutant he would have poked him, like that. He stuck his chubby fist out and dropped it on his horse's neck. It was the colonel, and there were four or five of those regimental chaps trying to keep him quiet. Hanging around

the door, with scared faces, whispering. He wanted me to understand that he wasn't in the least surprised, although to the best of his knowledge this was the first time the colonel had ever touched a drop. He'd shut himself up in his room in a farmhouse for two days during the last long halt with enough bottles to drown the regiment in, and this was the end effect of it. Stiff as a corpse on his bed, he was, and those chaps hanging around the door looking as though the sky had fallen. . . . He'd seen some bad cases before, but nothing to equal this. And the funny part of it was that up until his collapse no one had noticed anything special about his conduct. He was just the same as ever, a little colder and more precise, perhaps. But then you never were quite sure when you saw him moving whether he was a man or an animated waxwork . . .

He paused and mopped his brow with the sleeve of his raincoat. We were clattering over the cobbles near the square of a Moselle hamlet, and the river, a swift brown flood, showed patches of sleek, oily glitter between the ramshackle walls of dilapidated plaster houses. Puffs and streamers of dense mist, like cotton wool, clung to the blue-purple flanks of the hills opposite.

It was not until morning, I gathered, that the corpse had shown signs of life again, and the "regimental chaps" had stopped whispering. And then the corpse had begun to talk. There was something altogether strange about it, and altogether sinister. I stared at him, surprised. His round innocent eyes had a look of veiled horror in them. He had to stay on in that room, when the others had gone, and listen to the corpse talking. It had even adjusted the gold-rimmed pince-nez to its nose, quite as though it were alive and sane—and then something inside—he could only describe it as something mechanical, like a phonograph—had been set off. The mouth opened and closed, and the thing had begun talking, talking, in a rapid, cold voice. Broken bits of things, things of the past and present, things that had horrified him until he had expected—actually expected—well, he hardly knew what. The lid had been lifted, and he had looked inside, that was all. It was like lifting the lid of a latrine.

I glanced at him, not knowing whether to be shocked or amused by the look of bewilderment on his face. I had seen the colonel myself the next morning. . . . "Oh, yes." He nodded gloomily. "Quite himself again. Frozen up. The lid on again."

'Still, after you once looked into a man like that, you never forgot. And he had spoken of the kid —the boy. He wasn't going to say in what way, or how.' He jerked his horse's head up again viciously. 'But for the future. I could keep my smart Alecky remarks about the colonel to myself.' He spoke passionately. 'There were some things you didn't joke about, that was all.'

I managed to quiet him by switching the topic over to the weather and the latest "occupation" rumours. He became calm all of a sudden and smiled. He was getting in some kind of a new preparation to spray over the manure piles in the spring.

"Flies?" I asked, consolingly.

"Yes, flies." Where everyone kept piles of manure all over the place, he expected they'd be some new and vicious varieties breeding. It was no joke, of course. They even kept it in their cellars, and in tanks under their front "porches." Wonder to him they didn't lock it up in safes, or deposit it in the bank. It was all rot that the French were a dirty nation and the Germans a clean one. In his opinion, if I wanted to take it, they were one as bad as the other.

III

ONE DAY THE BANDS FLARED OUT DISMALLY, and the brassy notes, punctuated by the measured pounding of hob-nail shoes on cobbled streets, the clatter of iron hoofs, the jarring of heavy wheels, was echoed back by the loom of grey housefronts in an endless desolation of closed and shuttered windows, and the rounded dome and grim escarpments of Ehrenbreitstein leaned down heavily over a wall of mist, hanging low over the winter Rhine. The mist dissolved in rain that fell cold and bitter, in sheets, whipped off the grey hills to march in column and phalanx down the stream, and an iron suspension bridge rang and shivered under the brown flood of men,

of carts and of animals, moving athwart the brown flood below. Our Winter-night's dream of comfortable billets in some large Rhineland town was speedily dispelled by soggy typewritten sheets assigning us by brigade, regiment and battery to small villages on the fringe of the bridgehead sector. To each of these sheets was clipped a long stencilled memo of occupation details, accompanied by the "non-fraternizing" order which was to be read to the men at the earliest possible moment after assignment of billets.

It was a somewhat remarkable document, that order, defining our moral responsibility toward our enemy-neighbours, and limiting our communications to the *yea* and *nay* of Biblical admonition. I read it aloud the first night of our arrival in the beam and plaster village to which we were assigned while rain spouted down on my shoulders from the thatch of a tumbled-down hovel behind me and a lean peasant with sunken reddish eyes, a frowsy moustache and a piece of old horse blanket twisted over his head and shoulders, stopped prodding a pair of lean cows dragging a load of turnips in from the fields and stared up and down the line with an expression of mild and unhurried interest. He plodded off presently, shak-

ing his head and muttering, and the men, standing in double line, at ease, sighed while the disconsolate heavens poured water down on them and the narrow lane under foot changed to a brook of quite respectable dimensions. The order was to be emphasized and posted on the bulletin board outside of each unit's office. I turned it over to the first sergeant and forgot about it. There were other more exacting details to be attended to, such as enforcing on the burgomeister the necessity for sweeping the streets and keeping the more prominent manure piles from overflowing into them. It cropped up again in my mind, but only very vaguely, when I saw my young friend for the first time after our arrival. The doctor—very decently, I thought—had put him down for a sick-leave, but he had refused to take advantage of it. He had taken a Sunday afternoon off to favour me with a bit of unexpected news. He had broken through the walls of his silences, and was more vocal than ever. He came quite without warning, and there was that in the air with which he entered our mess room that told me he was bestowing a favour upon me. It was sufficiently in the manner of a child who takes possession of your time and person as a matter of course to be absurd. But the

expression of his face was harsh, cold, forbidding. . . . He resented the doctor's interference. It was an unwarranted, a malevolent conspiracy. He wasn't sick. No one was going to tell him he was sick. He wasn't going to be fooled or "mortified" by Colonel Sanderson.

It was warm in the sitting-room of the cottage where we sat, but he shivered. His eyes caught fitfully at my face, and then wandered off to the walls, hung with dreary photographs of the tintype variety, to the dingy horsehair-upholstered chairs pulled up to the bare dining-room table, littered with the remains of our Sunday dinner, to the tall solemn stove, like an upright coffin, in one corner. He ran his hand through his hair, throwing it back. He had clipped it in a desperate demonstration of manliness at the time when going to the front had "given him a feeling almost amounting to awe," and now it clung about his temples in damp, stringy curls. His beautiful manners had quite disappeared. He sat with his cap perched ridiculously on the back of his head, an unlit cigarette between his pale, thin lips, as if to steady their trembling. He had decided to stay on. He wasn't going to be "invalided out." He would leave if "Hervey wrote and asked him to." He wasn't

going to leave with "all this whispering going on around him."

"What whispering?" I asked, irritated.

He gazed at me fixedly with hollow eyes for fully a minute, and then asked abruptly if I really thought I could fool him. He knew people were talking about him. All over the place. Peasants, soldiers, everybody. He had only to turn his back, and everyone whispered and smiled. The sentinel in front of regimental hadn't even saluted him when he passed by, and just outside the town there were three men talking and laughing. It was too much. Of course if Hervey asked him to come to Paris, that would be different. Hervey was the only person who fully understood him anyway. He'd do anything at all for Hervey.'

I was about to ask him where his mother fitted into the picture and I checked myself. It occurred to me that the most remarkable feature of his recent conversations was his apparent dread of referring to her. . . . I got up, pushed my chair back from the table, and walked over to the window. The ticking of the cuckoo clock in the hall sounded like a precise, slow pulse-beat through the half open door. From the kitchen, across the hall, came a scrape and rattle of dishes, and the swish

of a broom on the brick floor. It was dark outside in the narrow alley. The dingy plaster houses across the street seemed to lean heavily toward me. A damp snow fell in heavy flakes that stuck and slid, melting, down the window-panes.

For the first time in my dealings with another human being I had a presentiment of utter helplessness, the sense of being confronted by an enigma that responded to no laws save its own, and mingled with it a faint feeling of repulsion. The details of those unmentionable actions of his at the front kept crowding back in my mind. The memory of them was stamped on the utter bleakness of his thin, exhausted face. It glanced at me through his eyes, fixed and staring.

I turned from the window, walked back and sat down. He hadn't moved. He sat bent forward slightly, with his eyes on the floor. He seemed to be listening intently to something that I could not hear.

"Well," I said, "so you're going to stick it out?"

He raised his eyes slowly, and they fell heavily on me. 'Stick it out? Of course. What else was there left for him to do?' The cigarette dropped from his lips. He leaned forward, his elbows on his

thighs, his small fists tightly clenched. He spoke in a shrill voice, almost hysterically.

"I wanted to go once. You wouldn't let me," he said.

So that was how it was. Colonel Sanderson had ruined his good time in the army. He had wanted to go and I had intervened and persuaded him to stay. I had persuaded him to give up his royal, disgruntled progress back to America. I was the responsible party. He had no will of his own. He had simply been pushed one way and another, like a feather blown about in a windy room. He couldn't be held accountable for his actions. He had no sense of responsibility; his mother had seen to that. He spoke wildly:

"I could have gone back to Hervey," he said. "You wouldn't let me."

There was utterly no use in trying to tell him the truth. I made a move as if to rise from my chair and in that instant a change came over him:

"Don't touch me," he screamed. "Don't you dare; don't you dare to touch me."

I started back, appalled. The noises from the kitchen ceased. In the interval of silence the ticking of the clock sounded loud and metallic in the

room. I stared down at the spectacle of quivering fright before me. The eyes in that pale face were fixed and staring, the lips had drawn back from the teeth in a perfect presentment of an animal snarl. In a dizzying second, before I caught myself, I had the notion that it was an animal I was staring at and not a human being. And then my vision cleared or his face changed. He had begun to whimper, rocking to and fro in the chair. 'He hadn't done anything, not one thing that he was sorry for. He had to strike, didn't he, when there were eyes around him? He had to step on those eyes when they kept staring up at him.' The gruesome horror of those nights at the front was back on him again, and he began to twitch and quiver. His clenched fists beat the air. 'They kept coming back at him at night. Then he had to fight. It was all right in the daytime. He could look around, dodge suddenly. But at night they crawled, stamping and scuffling, sometimes on their hands and knees around his bed. That was why people were laughing at him. They thought he wasn't big enough to get up and throw them out. But he'd show them! Oh, yes, he'd show them. And they couldn't drive him out. Not now. He had nowhere to turn to.

He couldn't go home. Not now. Perhaps never, never. . . .'

I managed to quiet him finally. He spoke rather pompously, almost rationally, before the afternoon was over. He reminded me vaguely of a small cock sparrow on a back wall, twittering. Perhaps he was afraid he had given himself away. He even apologized stiffly for his outbreak. He supposed he was a great nuisance to me at times. But he didn't want me to suppose that that was the way he really was. Oh, no—nothing like that. And nothing like what he had been at the front. He hadn't had a chance, that was all. It seemed to give him vague comfort, that dissociation. He was still, in his inmost soul, I could see, a creature of heroic potentialities, a martyr on whose brow the bloody crown of war had rested. His vanity was immeasurable. It was the sole link that remained to remind me of his former eager enthusiasms; the sole characteristic that had withstood the wrack of the storm outside and his brooding, panicky self-inquisitions. It was the only thing that gave me hope of his pulling out of the mess he had let himself in for. Such conceit, I figured, must be its own reward. And now he went on building up complicated little

fortresses of lies and rationalizations. It was a metaphysical exercise of the most brilliant sort. He kept his eyes carefully averted all the time. I quite forgot that a moment before I had been confronted by a mad dog that wanted to bite me. He repeated: 'He supposed he was a great nuisance to me at times, a great nuisance. But then he had felt drawn to me from the first. I had been rather sweet to him after all.' He reached out his hand with a timid gesture as though he wanted to stroke mine placatingly, and then jerked it away as though he remembered something. There was a small, guilty flush on his face. 'It was so disgusting to be so thoroughly misunderstood.' His eyes wandered to my face, slid off again, returned. He was giving himself away again! He checked himself abruptly.

He had come over to see me for two reasons, since, of course, there was no one else he could see or talk about such things to. The first was a package of letters. He drew them from his overcoat pocket and laid them on the table. There were about thirty of them I judged, tied together neatly, unopened, and they had all come in one batch the other day. If anything 'happened to him,' I was not to return them, but to destroy them. The second concerned some German girl or

other that he had picked up or met over in the Supply Company town. He didn't want the relationship misjudged. He was "protecting her." He knew the kind of things that went on. She was a very superior person. He had resolved to stay and protect her. . . .

He shuffled to his feet. His face had hardened again, and his eyes looked down into mine, warily.

IV

THE JANUARY FOGS FROZE INTO SNOW AND DURing the first three weeks of February steel-grey skies hung low over the Winter Rhineland. The meagre hamlets huddled in their hollows, and poured wisps of smoke into the cold, blue air. The low hills, swelling in waves to break against the formidable barrier of the forest, seemed to edge in closer. An outhouse, a haystack, the black line of a stone fence were things of sharp importance against the sheer consistency of the grey and white horizon. Life, that with the coming of the armistice, had danced to the meagrest tune of the unwonted, receded into its shell again and froze under the monotony of routine. In the omi-

nous chill of dawn while the stars still lived in a bleakness overhead, the bugles woke the barnyards, crackling out a summons to the still formless day. From dusty blankets under the eaves of haylofts, from narrow boxes stuffed with straw in cell-like farm rooms with strips of dirty calico nailed over the windows, from horsehair sofas drawn near the stoves of foul-smelling kitchens, forms stirred sluggishly, rose despondently, and the village awoke with the ring of hobnail shoes on the cobbles of narrow streets. Horses that had huddled together in the frozen mud of the Winter fields were yanked off the picket line and clopped heavily down the street to water in frozen troughs of wood, while the gunners went through setting up exercises in their shirt-sleeves, kicking their legs and flinging their arms to the count in the fields they had left vacant. Past my window as I sat at breakfast the schoolchildren trotted valiantly, their rucksacks tilted high on their backs, their necks swathed in grey knitted comforters, their round caps perched on the backs of their heads and their small round eyes fixed on the frozen road. The sun rose higher and the empty ox-carts rumbled out of the villages and began to move with incredible slowness across the snowy fields

where they appeared from afar like so many insects manœuvring across a sheet. The village baker arranged the day's dreary black loaves in his dusty window. The grocer, who was also the tobacconist and sold cigars made of "substitute" tobacco, laid out the packages of "substitute" coffee on his counter, and the barber, who was as immaculate as his shop was tidy, dusted off his glass shelf with its two shaving mugs and three bottles of perfumed water, stropped his razor, and raised the window curtain to glance out at the slow life of the village, a trickle of figures in old clothing like sacks, and the priest in black, with his hunched shoulders and bent knees, shuffling by with his chin resting on its rolls of fat.

After dinner in our officers' mess Cromer, the only officer left to me, picked his teeth and stared glumly at the stove. His black tooth-brush of a moustache was as neat and dogmatic as ever, but his dark eyes under their heavy brows wore a look of strain and fatigue. His zest for debate which had worried me out of my appetite on more than one occasion during our months of intimacy, had lost its edge. Monotony had closed his neat lawyer's mind, with its rows of pigeonholes each containing some duly labelled and undeniable fact, as the lid

of an old-fashioned desk is closed on the accumulation of dust and papers within. The one thing he pointedly refused to talk about was the boy and his troubles. Anything that happened to that young bastard was quite all right as far as he was concerned. He didn't trust the kid, never had. As between him and Colonel Sanderson there was nothing at all to choose. The only topics left to us were the weather and the prospects of getting home in the near future, and we quarrelled excitedly over these. In both cases, since the wish was father to the thought, which, in turn, was fed on a continual diet of false rumours, we wasted words and came to no conclusions. He wanted to get home and I didn't. I had no more desire to return than to stay where I was now, in the dung-heap village.

We did agree that Colonel Sanderson had been quiet too long, and that this was probably unhealthy. Even his sarcasms had lost the edge of their earlier inspiration, and as a topic for malicious gossip he was disappointing. The stories that were circulated about certain dubious events in his career at the front were hushed when he was awarded the Croix de Guerre and the Distinguished Service Cross. The headquarters gentlemen who

had arranged the award wore strained and guilty looks whenever the subject was mentioned, but there still remained the famous tale of his flight from a firing battalion in the neighbourhood of Sommerance to assuage the memories of past sarcasms and insults. The picture of the colonel, shorn of his riding crop and pince-nez, mounted on a kitchen limber which had just brought up the beans, clinging to the neck of the F battery mess sergeant, lashing the mules with his overcoat until he was finally thrown off into a shell hole where he stuck, was a classic in the folio of regimental caricature. As to witnesses, the only one capable of telling the tale in its entirety had vanished from the scene of the living at the colonel's express commandment. It was most annoying, and yet when I mentioned it to Cromer he mumbled something or other about the honour of the regiment adding that certain guys he knew of didn't seem to know on which side of their bread to put their butter. The allusion struck me as difficult, inept and impossible and I asked him to dry up.

But his remark had opened the hornet's nest of conflicting loyalties, and in a correct understanding of them there lay at least a part of the secret of the colonel's apparent success and the lack of

sympathy manifested toward such young men as he singled out for his special attentions. He could stir men not only to resentment against himself, but also against each other. Any insinuations as to his severely limited abilities reflected directly back on the regiment among whose members it was generally conceded that no finer or more representative body of men existed in the army. In that sense the nervous and protective attitude of the headquarters staff was comprehensible and even slightly contagious. As those philosophers reasoned it was a waste of everybody's time to worry over a situation that couldn't be avoided. The colonel was a superior being, endowed with influence in Washington and a complaint against him would therefore react with insidious force against the complainer. One by-product of his solitary detachment from men and events was the accumulation of a curious venom, and unless this had outlets outside the staff the effects within might be disastrous. It was better, as they reasoned, that he should pull the wings off flies than push pins through beetles. Thus his habit of threatening with his famous silver-handled riding crop any aged peasant whose rheumatics prevented him from pulling his cap from his head quickly enough

on the occasion of his august passages through our villages, reduced his sarcasms to a minimum during the dinner ritual in the regimental mess, a ceremony which, in its formal revival since the armistice, was driving the doctor from biliousness to nervous indigestion. His fondness for materializing at unexpected times in his officers' billets to see that no fraternizing with the natives was going on behind closed shutters, reduced his strange and solitary appearances at reveille to a minimum. As to his wholly interesting attitude toward the junior officers in his command, and the boy in particular, it was lost sight of in the general haze of ridicule that had supplanted the maternal blessing which was to have shone around the young man's brow like a halo. He was too unreal, on the whole, for his troubles to appeal as more than grotesqueries of an over-excited imagination. As to fraternizing itself, it was open to individual interpretation, after taps, at least, and it served in the end merely to raise a host of more or less metaphysical speculations. Was sleeping with a woman fraternizing with her? Could you, properly speaking, fraternize with a woman? Since such doubts could be raised, the only answer that suggested itself was via the

trial and error process with the shutters carefully closed.

And in the meantime the boy had favoured me with another brief visit during which he had imparted some interesting new details as to his latest mental attitudes. He had resolved to live out his time in the army "as a protest." Against what was quite beyond me. Also a spark of priggish chivalry had been touched by the plight of his "friend" the German lady. She was living in the same house with him—the large house of a fat and prosperous landlord farmer, a sort of local magistrate in the bargain. Her name was Stirner, with a *von* before it which he spoke lingeringly as though to impress me with a sense of her importance. She had served for months as a Red Cross nurse in the East near Brest-Litovsk, I gathered, and had gotten a discharge for "family reasons" after her father, commanding a regiment of *Landwehr* infantry and her brother one of the youngest officers in his own battalion, had been killed at Douaumont on the Western front. She had returned to Elberfeld where her mother was living with her youngest sister in order to help them at home. For two years the pension had proved sufficient to keep them,

and then the rising cost of everything had forced her to look for some kind of an occupation in the country where she could send back butter and fats instead of wages. His chivalrous instincts, I gathered, had been at once aroused by this story of a lady with a *von* before her name working for butter and fats. He seemed to have entirely forgotten that gentlemen with *vons* before their names had shelled Rheims and forced him to take up the flaming sword in defence of Beauty. She was twenty-six years old, and "beautifully educated" by his account of it; had visited Greece and Italy before the war and knew ever so much more than he did about the history of art. She even painted a little in water-colour, and had done some quite excellent things of the Winter fields outside their farmhouse, with the dark line of the Winter forest sweeping across the snowy uplands, straight as a ferruled margin on white paper. . . .

The nature and extent of these confidences between them on a few days' acquaintance struck me at the time as amusing, and I scented no potential danger in the offing. I felt, rather, a sense of relief. He had someone else to confide in for the future. Nothing could make him any worse than he was, so it might make him better. I felt that I needed

and deserved a little vacation from his hysterics. He spoke rather loftily on the whole. His tone was ever so slightly reminiscent of his enthusiasm after his first splendid visit to Paris. This was one of these friendships on a higher plane. At the same time he didn't want me to think that he "had gone over to the enemy." Not in the least. There was nothing—well—physical in their relationship at all. His mouth quivered as though the very thought of such a thing were frightening, and his eyes almost immediately dodged from my face. He had been dignified and courteous from the first, that was all. And as a superior being with a *von* before her name she had, of course, appreciated this. They were careful not to discuss the war, although as far as that was concerned he was "quite neutral."

And he went on in a strained eager fashion to tell me about the first evening of their meeting. He had walked into the sitting-room of the farmhouse toward dusk, just after the children had been put to bed. She was sitting at the piano, and he had asked her if he might listen. He had noticed from the first that she was "refined looking" and inclined to be distant. Not like the farmer himself, who was as fat and greasy as one of his

own pigs, and his wife who was nothing more than "an illiterate peasant." They had talked about music at first. There was no limit to those conversations as far as I could judge. I had the feeling as of a dam bursting and a flood of words and emotions issuing while the piano tinkled. He insisted on an element of secrecy in the whole affair. He knew what some—well—the lot of the regiment were. He was prepared to defend her, of course. They could whisper behind his back, but he wasn't to be trifled with. And gazing at his features, congealed in that mask of half-terrified, sneering defiance, I perceived that he was right.

But I was vastly consoled, none the less—for a few days, anyway—until I ran into the doctor one afternoon shortly after mess on a side alley near our orderly room. He was standing with his hands in the pockets of his trench coat, the tail of which stuck out behind like the end-piece of a bantam rooster, peering down from over the rim of his glasses at a disorder of dirt and refuse which had collected in a narrow alley between the kitchens of two plaster hovels. Behind him a very tall medical orderly with a solemn, ironical face

and a brown hat perched on his thin head like a paper bag, was holding to the bridles of two camel-backed monstrosities who stood with their heads sagging and a general air of collapse about them, as though their bones were loose. The doctor took his hand out of his pocket and raised a forefinger to his right eyebrow as I approached. He cast a doubtful eye on me.

"Oh, you're working, are you? I thought you never worked. I had an idea you always slept."

"The Hell you did," I said.

He adjusted his glasses with both hands.

"Don't swear," he said. "There's no need for it." He paused and turned to stare at the refuse in the alley. "That's quite nice, isn't it? You've got the dirtiest village in the regiment."

I stared at him.

"You haven't been reading another book, have you?"

"Oh," he said. "You like the subject. Ha, Ha! Yes." He snorted. "You're quite funny. Like a crutch. I've never been in a filthier place in my life. Spring, then—bang—flies all over the place."

He raised his hand suddenly and snapped his fingers. One of the nags jerked his head up from

the ground as though to emphasize the point. The lean orderly rolled a solemn eye in imbecile fashion at me, and spat a long, thin, brown stream into the gutter.

"What about that new stuff in cans?" I asked.

He looked at me suspiciously, hooking his thumbs in his trench-coat pocket.

"None of your business," he said gloomily. He flushed, drew a brown cotton handkerchief from his coat pocket, took off his glasses and began to wipe them. "That kid of yours is in a pretty pickle," he said.

"What kid?" I asked.

He looked at me ominously.

"That woman of his—she's a whizz-bang."

"A what?" I asked.

"Oh, I suppose you don't know." He rammed his hands down in his overcoat pocket. "Fellers like you wouldn't. You've too many of them around here to keep you awake nights." He rubbed his nose with his finger, gazing thoughtfully down at the refuse pile, then shrugged, caught up the bridle reins from his orderly, and clambered heavily into the saddle, holding on to the pommel with both hands. His beast lurched, quivered,

threw up its head and dropped it again. He gazed down at me gloomily.

"You'd better watch out around here," he said. "Colonel got that new young feller from D Battery."

I said that I wasn't a "new young feller," and that as far as I knew D Battery deserved all that was coming to it.

"Oh, does it?" he asked. "And your place. Looks like a sty. I wouldn't keep a pig in these streets. Not a decent pig."

He shook his reins, nodded to his orderly who had draped himself like a couple of flung sacks over his own nag's back, and kicked his horse with his heel. The beast quivered and dropped its head again.

"Why don't you put him on wheels?" I asked. "Then you could pull him."

"He'll go," he said, painfully. "He'll go when I want him to." Just now, I was to understand, he wanted to warn me—and that young friend of mine too.

"He's been complaining about the way you treat him," I said, amused.

He looked down at me, angrily.

"Oh, has he?" he asked. "Just like him. Two jumps ahead of the strait-jacket. He does nothing—absolutely nothing but hold hands with that female."

I stared:

"Must be exciting for her."

His round eyes clouded with anger.

"Oh, you think it's funny do you? You would. You think the old man ain't got eyes in the back of his head. You think he can't see through a window with the shades pulled." He raised his legs and thumped his horse in the ribs violently. The beast shook himself and took a few tentative steps forward as if to put an end to the altercation.

"Hey!" I shouted.

He turned in his saddle, his eyeglasses gleaming defiance at me.

"Don't shout at me," he said. "*I'm* not a lunatic."

V

IT WAS SOME TIME BEFORE I MET THE LADY IN question, and then it was by accident—during a Winter ride through the snowy silences of the forest that rolled away in a solid wall of shadow between our village and the frozen banks of the Rhine.

I came upon them walking arm in arm under a vaulting roof of pine trees in one of the gloomy by-ways of the wood. The large black eyes in her sharply moulded face were not reassuring, and her profile struck me as predatory, like that of a hungry bird. I was sufficiently startled by the appearance of that curiously assorted pair to have ridden by with only the vaguest of salutations, but the

look on the boy's face was expectant, eager. . . . He had some especially good news to tell me. Hervey had written him that applications for enrolment in the Army Student Corps at the Sorbonne and elsewhere in France would shortly be in order, and he had telephoned over to regimental that very same day to inquire about it. . . . She hung back while he talked to me, after the introductions, with her head turned away. Wisps of black hair strayed out from a small grey cap of wool, like a Tam-o'-Shanter, pinned up on the top of her head. Her black eyes stole to my face and then wandered off again, uneasily, while the boy went on gesticulating. It was important, of course, that he go as soon as possible, and Hervey had pointed out in his letter how appropriately the order fitted in with his particular case. He gazed up at me stiffly, condescendingly. He didn't imagine that there were very many men in the regiment—or in the army, for that matter—who would really appreciate the value of such an opening, but with him, of course it was different. Paris and the Sorbonne 'had always been his dream.' He would take an apartment in some particularly appropriate spot—Hervey lived on the Ile St. Louis—with a view of barges and bridges and church spires up and down

the river. He took off his cap and ran his fingers through his loose curls. 'He was particularly sensitive to just that sort of thing.'

"To what?" I asked. "To rivers?"

His face quivered at my stupidity. 'Oh, no. Not to rivers in general. To the Seine.'

"You'd better wait to find out whether you can go or not, hadn't you?" I asked, as gently as I could.

He shook his head, gazing at me fixedly. 'Oh, no. If he made up his mind—' He left the sentence unfinished. 'It would put an end to this whispering. He wasn't going to stand for that anyway, very much longer. As for me—I'd interfered before. This time—' He paused and folded his arms on his thin chest.

"This time what?" I asked, harshly.

His eyes startlingly still and vacant gleamed suddenly. He spoke in a low, quivering voice.

"I've written home to my tutor."

The remark brought me up sharp. I had forgotten how utterly pathetic he was. I collected my wits rapidly.

"Oh," I said. "Your tutor. That's different, of course."

He nodded as though vastly encouraged. Further

than that he wasn't prepared "to take any action as yet." Of course his tutor would write to the adjutant and tell him how advisable it was that he complete his education at the Sorbonne. I gazed down at him in the gathering twilight. His face had gone curiously slack, only the twitching tensions behind it seemed to hold it together. . . . His lady friend had stopped scraping at the root with her foot, and in her perfect immobility and silence I fancied there was something stealthy. I gazed at her, puzzled, and then remembered that this was not a 'physical relationship' but something loftier, higher. Her chin, disagreeably pronounced, ran to a long point. I had the distinct and unpleasant sensation of looking at someone I would have preferred never to have seen, and suddenly, without any apparent connexion between the two, I thought of the boy's first friend who had carried the little red book by the man who had had revelations in Adyar. She resembled him in some point or other. She looked like someone who belonged in a book, a rather disagreeable book, I judged. She also looked distinctly capable of having revelations. The boy had already hinted to me about her possession of certain mystic powers. She was "psychic," whatever that might mean.

His mother, I remembered, had also been "psychic" and had extraordinary power of intuition. . . .

She left the tree against which she had been leaning and drew closer to us, sliding along over the snow as though to avoid detection. I gazed from one face to the other. The boy's quivered suddenly. He raised his hand to his brow. "I'm not—not sleeping," he said. He drew himself up and frowned at this additional spectre, his inability to sleep or to rest. His fists were clenched. Oh, he'd get even with it—this added persecutor. Like the army, like Colonel Sanderson, like all of us who were eternally whispering, it had conspired against him. But it couldn't beat him. No. He gasped, shook himself. She came sliding over and laid a hand on his arm.

VI

THE FORMAL PROCESSION OF COLD, BLUE DAYS was broken by rain and by fogs that choked the valleys of the two broad rivers, rolled through the wide, grey streets of the town at their intersection, pushed up toward the crests of the wooded ramparts and clung like the ghosts of banners to the ghostly, crumbling castles. Over the ponderous masonry of Ehrenbreitstein the flag with the blue field and red and white stripes tugged and pulled at its pole in the Wintry gales that flung themselves with teeth of sleet down the river, howling around the clustered chimney pots of the town below. The great river lunged along its course between the hills, and rolled out along the plains

like a spent charger, its mane whipped about by the wind; and the sentries guarding it, men from the flat plains of Dakota, the grim streets of Chicago, the slums and by-ways of Manchester, the little towns of Provençe, stared at it and thought of home.

Fog came again, brimming over the valleys of the vineyarded hills, filling the high roads in the wake of the jarring grey convoys and the routine marches of brown and blue columns; slipping stealthily down the long, silent aisles of the forest and rolling out again on the black fields where the melting snow still clung in patches like dirty cotton cloth. The beam and plaster hamlets cowered in their folds in the fields, and sent dreary trickles of life out along the roads that lifted and fell with the rise and fall of the hills like wakes of ships across an ocean of rollers. And the armies that had poured themselves despondently in brown floods over the broken dam of war, rested threateningly on the accomplished and unsatisfactory fact of Victory, like sullen lions, clasping gnawed bones in their paws.

A creeping paralysis held the land in its grip, and with it came the subtle, intangible feeling of decay and corruption. In the manufacturing towns

long rows of silent factories stood shoulder to shoulder like grey hives out of which the bees have swarmed, and their silence amid a bristling profusion of chimneys held in it something enigmatic, conjectural, foreboding. Along the pale, deserted alleys women and old men, as grey as the rags they were bundled in, stole along pursuing the mean crusts and dry bones of slow starvation. Silently they passed the field kitchens parked in the desolate squares, their iron mouths glowing with fire, their iron bellies steaming with food in boilers and vats; and at dusk the grey-faced schoolchildren trotted back from the schoolyards on legs like frail sticks, too shaky to support them.

And from the unknown land to the east of us, beyond the last line of infantry outposts, more rumours of starvation and revolution kept trickling in. The occupied sectors, bulging out from the bridgeheads at Mainz, at Coblenz and Cologne, held the heart of the land in a grip of steel, and beyond the circumference of the arcs lay the shadowy and the enigmatic. The broad highways and the straight railroads cut through those arcs, and reaching their circumference dropped over the horizon of the known and familiar into the unknown. From one of the hill-tops you could look

away for miles across the black or snowy fields with here and there a castle-crowned summit, and the dismemberment that had gone on drew your imagination until the land beyond the hills seemed fraught with strange dangers and gigantic encounters, and its very quiescence under the grey skies a threat.

There was nothing, of course, to be done about it. I had the assurance of my new friend, the burgomeister of our village, on that score. He occupied a three-story house with a pronounced bulge to the upper floors that leaned rakishly over the intersection of two of the foulest smelling alleys in the entire village. It bore a plate over the door with the double Prussian eagle on it, and the proudest manure pile in the whole village underneath, a monstrous affair built up squarely to the level of the sitting-room windows, to the intense disgust of the little doctor who snorted every time he passed by. His office, where the windows were kept tight shut throughout the Winter, boasted a deal table, a file of papers on the wall, and a number of neatly arranged rubber stamps set on their ink pads. It had an indefinable smell about it of cabbage and dust and old people, and whenever he saw me coming down the street he dropped what-

ever he was doing, turned and ambled back into his house hastily, sat down behind his table and began unwinding layers of woollen muffler from around his head and neck so that if I surprised him it would be in his official capacity. He was very old and thin and toothless, and reminded me vaguely of a frail and dusty caterpillar that had outlived the summer foliage. He treated me to a mixture of deference and craftiness that I found unaccountably amusing. He filled my ears with tales of woe from the French occupied area where he had relatives, and where the Senegalese in red fezzes stood guardian over the dung heaps like black roosters. Oh, there were atrocities enough if I would only believe him. He seized an imaginary rifle from the table, made noises in his throat like a hen drinking and swooped his thin arms about jabbing here and there as with a bayonet. *"Alles caput."* Germany was dead, finished. He blinked his red-rimmed eyes, rubbed his dry hands together and cackled. He was too old, and where there should have been tears and groans, there was only dry, senile laughter. I listened, half amused, half puzzled. Something had happened in Paris. Perhaps the one-track mind had been derailed. The outpost detachments were being strengthened by

artillery emplacements, and the talk of going home was succeeded by astonishing rumours of a general advance with a new frontier line on the Elbe.

An order came through, and we marched out one morning early to blow up a few potato patches over the heads of the infantry who were to throw hand-grenades at the forest. A number of war-like Congressmen who were occupying the water-front hotels in Coblenz had clamoured for a combat demonstration. We fired point-blank into the mist, the countryside rocked and roared for upward of an hour, and we marched back to our villages again. It was a break in the monotony of routine drill, but the local effects were disastrous. The Congressmen had dismounted from a brown limousine to chat with the colonel; the colonel had lost his head and galloped up and down behind the second battalion positions, putting various people, chiefly officers, under arrest. There was no reason for it, but it was remembered that he had had panics before within the sound of the guns on occasions when Congressmen were conspicuously absent. It was also recalled that he had lost the opportunity for some time now of affronting us personally at mess, and that his venom had probably collected.

It was an idiotic performance, suggestive of a badly arranged farce, but there were all the elements in it of a spectacular nervous crisis and there had been one wanting, to the best of my knowledge, ever since the armistice. Under the circumstances I was hardly surprised when the adjutant came over to see me that same evening shortly before retreat, his round, rosy face violently mussed up with anger as though someone had been throwing boiling water on it. When I told him that I considered the affair of the morning had been unexpectedly disgusting, he flared up and asked me "what the Hell I meant by that." His tone, loud and angry enough, immediately became apologetic. . . . 'He hadn't come to see me about that. That was none of my affair anyway.'

He tugged his face to one side, pulling at the end of his long moustache while the engine of his sidecar raced and spluttered outside the door of our orderly room, and the clerk, picking at a battered typewriter mounted on two soap boxes, slid his startled eyes around at us and immediately slid them back again as though they were moved in grooves.

I stared at the spectacle of round-faced discomfiture before me, and then deliberately turned my

back and went on shuffling through a pile of service records on the table before me. He stood quietly for a moment, and then walked on around in front of me and began to bluster uncertainly. "Someone, he didn't know who, but someone was eggin' that goddam kid on."

"What goddam kid?" I asked coldly.

He brushed my remark aside as though he had not heard me, and his voice, unconvincingly harsh and passionate ran on: 'Did I know he'd been impudent from the first? Did I remember what he'd done back there in training camp?' I said of course I remembered. What of it? The war was over. . . .

"His ain't," he said. "Not by a goddam sight. If it were me I'd have the skin off his back in inches."

"Did you learn that at West Point?" I asked. "Or from the Colonel?"

He flushed suddenly, took a step forward, stared at me furiously. His mouth under his ridiculous sagging moustache was half open. He closed it with a snap.

"Look here," he said, "this—"

"Yes," I said, without looking up. "Why don't you put in for another medal for him?"

He opened his mouth again, stared, and then began to bluster weakly. 'He hadn't come over to argue with me about any such goddam nonsense.'

"What's the rest of the nonsense, then?" I asked, impatiently.

"Look at that." He fumbled in his pocket, took out a small letter such as ladies use to invite each other to tea parties, and flung it down on the desk before me. I opened it indifferently, and then stared, not knowing whether to be amused or startled. It was from the boy's tutor. Of course. It was addressed to "His Excellency, Colonel Sanderson." I glanced through the contents hurriedly. "As an old friend of the family," etc. "he had already written to Washington." There followed a host of flurried compliments to the boy's accomplishments. One phrase started out. His mother had not heard from him since the regiment had gone to the front. She was ill, desperately ill— I glanced up. The face of the man above me was set in an angry frown. "Goddam impudence," he muttered. 'And that wasn't the half of it.'

I pushed the letter aside, vaguely troubled. The voice began its blustering again.

'Did I know he'd been parading that professional slut of his right under the Colonel's nose?

And the goddam woman was—well, he'd leave that part out of it. But ask the doctor, if I wanted to, where all the infection over at the Supply Company was coming from. . . . Ryan's orderly was in the hospital. And the kid had been dragging her over to regimental headquarters lately, hanging around the office with her as if—well . . . He'd told a hot one today to the sergeant major about the way some corporal or other had mistreated one of the kitchen wenches in her house. Lettin' on that he wanted to defend her. And he'd had a scene with Ryan, his C.O. She was a trouble maker, and Ryan wanted to have her run out. He'd flown off the handle like a goddam alley cat, kicking and scratching. . . .'

"Look here," I said, wearily. "He's off his head. Why don't you lads get wise to yourselves?"

"Yes," he said. "That's the hell of a question, isn't it? And that on top of it." He dropped his fist on the neat, handwritten note lying amid a sprawl of dirty records like a petal in a gutter. "Just the kind of a remark I'd expect from a goddam Plattsburgh man."

He turned his back, shrugged, and started to walk off toward the door. I sat for a moment of profound uneasiness, staring down at the letter in

the delicate handwriting, and then followed him. The narrow street between a jumble of housewalls and leantos had melted clear of snow and lay black, wet and glistening underfoot. The red guidon hung limp from its pole at the door. Melting snow dripped from the eaves overhead, ran in rivulets down the irregular flagging of the courtyards, cluttered with ancient carts, old lumber and farm implements to swell the turgid flood that flowed slick and glistening down the gutter. The tilt of the sharp peaked roofs, the straw thatched covers of the hayricks, in the fields that lifted beyond the housewalls, the irregular tops of sagging stone walls, dividing one manure pile from another along the narrow street, all held patches of glitter that swarmed together in a single white flame in the full flood of sunshine.

I crossed the street to the sidecar whose driver was racing the engine noisily preparatory to moving off, and dropped my hand on the adjutant's shoulder as he started to clamber in. The roar of the engine between the close-drawn housewalls was deafening.

"Look here," I shouted. "Something has to be done about this, you know."

He shook my hand off and crouched down in the

low seat, turning the collar of his coat up around his ears.

"Oh, yeah?" he said. "Oh, yeah? Try and do it, then. Take it up with the old man and see where it lands you." He flipped up his arm, drew back the sleeve and glanced at his wrist watch.

"Goddam," he shouted. "I've got to get out of here."

VII

THE SUN SHONE, FULL AND WARM, FOR A DAY or two and early in the morning of the Sunday that followed the network of wires that lay over the land of forests, fields and hamlets, dropping from grey poles that marched up and down the hills, clinging to the moss-grown trunks of the trees in the Westerwald, swinging out over the hurrying Winter torrents and dropping in to the great towns where the corps artillery stood hooded and waiting in the squares, came to life; the bugles spoke shrilly in the chill of the foredawn, and the armies arose.

The order, a confused and hurried one, had come through the usual channels the night before, and until early dawn supplies of food and ammunition

had flowed in on us from the great truck convoys pounding along the high road between the river and the headquarters town. Something had happened in the glittering ante-rooms of the diplomatic hospitals in the city that radiated despondency to the world, some stiffening of the necks of unskilful surgeons quarrelling over the wretched patient on the table. He had squirmed, moved, under the knife. It was advisable that he should not move, squirm again. Even if the knife were to slip, graze the heart by mischance, stop the heart for ever . . . still it was advisable. . . . The flat voice of the battalion sergeant major that came faintly through the wire to me with the order to "push off" was jerked into extinction as the signal details began to coil in the wires. The sun pushed up above the dark, misty wall of the forest and hung like a red ball pendant over the vast scene of activity below. Scattered outposts and detachments were sucked into the stream of the great columns, that, as they moved sullenly from village to village and town to town, began to lengthen like some vast serpent swelling and rolling out over the highroads that led toward Limburg. And an air of tragedy that held in its elements of the comic hung everywhere.

In the doorways and by the gates of the dilapidated houses, old women done up in shawls stood mopping their eyes, and senile old men grinned in a childish and frightened fashion. There were scenes of frantic and hurried leave taking, and German children clinging to the ragged coat-tails of American privates with names like Moshowitz, Schmidt and Goldberg, and plain Smith and Jones, bawled with their mouths open and would not be comforted. The boys were going to the war again, that was all, and for the rest it did not make much difference whose boys they were. Their own were mouldering in hastily scooped out graves in the Vosges and Ardennes in the lowlands near Lille, the stark ridges of the Carnic Alps and the dusty plains near Vilna. And boys and young men, with their hard ways, their drunkenness, their quick rages passing into the sunshine of good humour, are always the same. . . . It mattered so little what their names were. Schmidt could speak German already, and it was good to sit around the stove at night, while Smith, with his ruddy face glowing, ran into his conversations the four phrases he had memorized and made up for the rest of it quite nicely on his stubby fingers.

The shrill blasts of the first sergeant's whistle

cutting through the fogs of the narrow streets, drew the men into line. The great wheel teams with their heavy flanks and braided manes, with small saddles and khaki rolls packed on their mountainous backs like small humps on huge camels, were backed into the limbers. The lean lead teams pulled the traces straight, the iron wheels ground over the narrow streets where the ruts were melting into muddy streamlets; the red guidon dipped and fluttered from its pole; the long column with the smoking field kitchen in the rear heaved and strained up over the hill; and became one with the grey-brown columns and grinding wheels following in the wake of the brown infantry serpent that had already glided off ahead towards the east. . . .

Inside of five days it was all over, and we were back in our villages again, soaked and disgruntled. Hostilities with a non-existent enemy had been averted, and the skies had taken revenge on us in rain and hail. We were given a holiday to clean up and rest, but there was no stopping the bugler. We were yanked out of bed in the foredawn; the animals were watered, fed and groomed; billets were set in order against a possible inspection. There was a compulsory Y. M. C. A. lecture in the

mess hall; by that time it was noon, and the animals had to be fed and watered again. Retreat was scheduled as usual and the mange-gang had a little extra work on a dozen or so of new and hairless horses that had been dumped in on us by some division or other preparing to withdraw from support in the rear.

It was not an altogether successful holiday, but there were a couple of hours free in the afternoon; I arranged for Cromer to take retreat, and started off on a ride through the Westerwald, intending to stop in the Supply Company village on the way home and have a talk with the boy. I hadn't the faintest notion what I was going to say to him. I hadn't seen him since the "advance" had jarred in our routine. I was a little anxious about him.

The air had been heavy lately with rumours of an order reassigning the billets and villages within the occupied area, and I was concerned as to how this might react on his new and wholly interesting attitudes. Probably, I figured, if the Supply Company were moved, he would conceive of it as a scheme on the colonel's part to separate him from his unusual and artistic friend. He had strolled over from his own column during the Division inspection that preceded the "advance"

in a darkly confidential mood, to inform me that he had acquired fresh information as to the general conspiracy against him in the regiment; that all the higher officers, including Major Gail and the adjutant were concerned in it; that they were one and all "jealous" of him and his friendship with the German lady, and that he had resolved to protect her from the entire army, if necessary. The doctor, moreover, had aroused his suspicion by his insistence on "looking him over." He'd given him a number of C.C. pills; a dose for a horse. They had made him violently ill. I think he meant to imply that the doctor had tried to poison him. Out of jealousy also, I presume.

I rode out of the village shortly before three o'clock in the afternoon; the burgomeister, mounted on a thin load of potatoes drawn by two thin cows gave me a toothless grin at the edge of the fields. I struck up the hills by a short cut, and the forest closed in around me.

I knew the main trails fairly well. They cut the wood up into large parallelograms, following the march of the long straight aisles, barring the sky overhead, and cleared of all underbrush at their roots in the manner of forests that have been tended and cultivated through generations. The

one that I had chosen ran parallel to the forest margin, and the intersecting trails at first opened narrow vistas of the rolling plains I had left. The little villages lay on their hill-tops and in the hollows like yellow ivory pieces scattered over the black checkerboard of the fields. Snow gleamed between the trees that formed a bristling rampart around the grey castle lifting above the division headquarters town, and more snow lined the edges of the wooded land on the crests of the hills. The trail underfoot was still deep with slush that packed and balled in my horse's hoofs and made the going difficult. A few frightened rabbits jumped across the trail and disappeared as though the grey-white earth below the looming tree trunks had swallowed them. Once in awhile a squirrel stirred in the matting of twigs overhead, and then snow sifted from the boughs and fluttered down with uncanny stillness. The air was cool and damp, the subtle sense of growing things gave a shadowy promise of Spring, and the steamy mist that rose from the ground between the trees turned the atmosphere to a stilly silver twilight.

The trail I was riding along cut on straight through the forest without a turn and emerged again on the highroad at a point that marked the

southernmost limit of the area of the American occupation, a gloomy cluster of peasant hovels clinging to the edge of a bluff that overlooked Bad Ems and the valley of the Lahn just before it lost itself in the tall Rhine ramparts. From the high-point where the trail and the road met, the view swept over the thick-clustered town, set near the rapid river, to a cup-shaved valley, the Winter fields broken here and there with small dense patches of forest, and a broken angle in the hills opened like the door of a tent on the still flame and fire of the sunset.

I had timed myself to reach the bluff a few moments before the sun went down, and I arrived to see a red ball, like a balloon on fire, slip slowly into a wall of mist that had collected in the valleys. It had grown dark in the forest before I emerged, and now it was dark on the plains. To add to my annoyance, my horse had developed a limp. I turned, and made off at a slow pace toward the Supply Company village, the furthest south in the regimental area, and the nearest to me as I headed back along the main road.

The mist that had blown in with the sunset, slipping along the aisles of the forest was now stealing out over the plains, and it was pitch black,

without a star overhead, when a single pencil of light reached out across the fields toward me from the Supply Company hamlet. I pushed on at a cautious trot, and came out on a street between housewalls set at wide intervals with electric bulbs swung from iron brackets. The shutters of the houses were closed. The street wore an air of cold desertion. I rode along to the orderly room in a brick house about midway down the street. The shutters were open and a flood of light fell out into the night. The door was also open, and the hallway within was dark. I jumped off and rapped on the window. There was no answer. I knotted the reins to a fence rail, walked up the steps, pushed the door of the orderly room open. It was as deserted as a tomb—and then I remembered that it was pay day. It accounted for the absence of civilians on the streets and the closed and shuttered windows.

I had a vague notion that the boy's billet was in a house at the lower end of the village. I walked along the highroad until I reached the first lamp bracket, and entered a narrow alley that dipped down a hill between a vague oppression of dark housewalls. As I turned the corner, the night that had been silent before came suddenly alive with

a sharp clatter of voices. The windows of a little inn sunk in the shadows behind a fantastically littered courtyard threw a smear of light on the road, that crept half-way up the wall of the house opposite. A heavy odour of boiling cabbage, wet manure and stale beer floated in the air. The tumult increased as I approached. The shutters of the inn were open, three or four panes had been smashed out of the windows, and from the sound coming out I judged that the Supply Company was making a night of it. Voices babbled in the shadows all around me. Someone was leaning against the wheel of a broken cart in the courtyard, vomiting, and someone else standing beside him, with his face turned up toward where the moon ought to have been, was cursing the night roundly. "Son-of-a-bitch Thomson, son-of-a-bitch Thomson." 'He'd got the son-of-a-bitch Thomson before,' so the night was given to understand, and 'he'd get the son-of-a-bitch again.' What he would do to him struck me as vague and complicated, but it involved, I believe, strangling and also carving with a knife. The man beside him went on coughing and retching like a dismal accompaniment to his profanity. Someone inside was singing in a loud voice that teetered off the high notes

and rose in a shriek toward the end of each stanza. The words were indistinguishable and the absence of tune was impressive.

At the first bend in the alley, the sounds dropped off as though someone had fitted a lid over a boiling pot. I turned to the right at the next street intersection and came up blindly against a housewall at the end of what appeared to be a blind alley. I turned at the faint, distant tinkling of a piano from somewhere in the gloom beyond the entrance to the lane I had left. A figure emerged from the night and stepped out into the dull glow from an electric lamp fixed to a housewall at the point where the two streets merged. The light moulded the tight lines of the close-fitting overcoat, the crook of the silver-handled riding crop, the rapid, mincing movements of the legs in polished russet boots, against the blackness beyond. And I started back as instinctively as though I were dodging a blow aimed at me from the shadows.

We were within ten paces of each other, but he did not turn his head. He walked off ahead of me, and the darkness engulfed him as smoothly as though he had dropped through the trap door of a

stage. For a moment I had the queer, half sickening sensation of "seeing things." The feeling was provoked by memories of his earlier habit of materializing silently where he wasn't expected and just as mysteriously disappearing again. This time the night, evil and black, had taken him off. A flight of piano notes rose in a soaring crescendo, and brought me back sharply to my senses. It dawned on me with chilling suddenness that we were both bound for the same destination. I stood rooted to the road, straining my eyes and ears. A mere scrap of light sifted out from a shuttered window in the distance ahead of me, and the piano crescendo that had dropped into a minor refrain seemed to be about as far away. I wanted to turn, and instead I began walking forward cautiously.

I had no business to be there, and I knew it. Every sane instinct I possessed warned me off, and a sort of insane curiosity drew me on against my will, the kind of curiosity that draws a crowd to stare at a man who has died on the sidewalk. I was spying and I knew I was spying. I crept forward as cautiously as a man impelled toward some crime he is only half-willing to commit. And then I halted suddenly. How did I know he had not halted too, was not listening, perhaps in the shadow

of some doorway? Supposing I came up on him from behind and collided with him. It wasn't the absurdity of it I dreaded, but the feeling of utter insecurity that the knowledge of his presence somewhere in the night gave me, the insecurity born of months of appalled awareness of him, of half sickening dread of his appearances, of strong distrust and aversion.

The piano had begun again, this time a jerky, swinging mazurka, and its loudness gave me the first inkling of how close I had drawn. I was afraid to move my feet or draw a breath. Someone might swing a shutter open; the light might fall on the road between us, I might find his eyes fixed on my face with that heavy staring regard with which he seemed to lean his whole weight of emptiness against you. The situation was perfectly simple, and as I perceived it suddenly, perfectly inexplicable. Nothing that I could have said would have mattered. He would know that I had been spying on him. And then I saw what I had not noticed before, a shadow in the spot of illumination that fell from one of the shuttered windows out on the road, and I knew that the colonel was not listening and looking at me, but was preoccupied.

It was the quiescence of that shadow that gave

me a chill; the suddenness with which the beating and battering on the shutter was begun. The piano crashed into silence. The window and the shutter with it were flung open. The light darting out held the long, livid face of the man in sharp relief, the face that seemed to be forced up with the neck by the choking high coat collar. The form of the boy in the window was a thin shadow, with another shadow pressed close to it. I heard a sudden half-strangled cry in a voice that must have been the boy's. I saw him dart back, dragging the white face beside him out of the light. I saw the shutter close with a slam; the slender riding crop raised, whirled, beating again and again in futile fury against the window. I heard a woman's voice in a shriek of mad, wild laughter. And with that shriek of laughter pursuing me, I turned and ran stumbling through the blackness up the street.

VIII

WHY I RAN I DO NOT KNOW. I HAD WITnessed nothing except the Colonel in one of his habitual nocturnal prowlings, and it seemed to me that I had witnessed everything that concerned him and the boy, all of us, since we had been together in the regiment. My response in retreating was as automatic as all my responses had been from the beginning to a situation whose implications I felt dimly and could not fathom. I wanted to keep clear of it as one tries to keep clear of a malarial swamp one senses beside the blind darkness of a strange road. I was drawn to it as one is drawn to a stagnant pool in a forest. . . . I had a leave coming to me then. I got out the next morning before reveille.

When I thought it over on the broad, bright beach at Nice in the yellow haze of the Mediterranean sunshine, it seemed as unreal to me as a dream from which I had awakened; a dream that had been long—too long—that was part of a more lurid dream from which the world, too, was trying to awaken. The boy had evaded all my calculations as to his character and possibilities as easily as a small fish slips through a net. And who was I to judge him—or Colonel Sanderson for that matter? What did I actually know? Nothing. Words. The fat little doctor's words, suspicions, forebodings; other men's gossip. Talk, talk, talk. And what else had there been to talk about or think of in the last few months? Once again, nothing. . . . In the warm mists of blue days, of nights when the breath of the slumbering ocean moved like a restless presence through the dry palms in the gardens, when the night, marvellously alive with stars, leaned down over my window, waiting, beckoning, challenging with its infinite peace—they glided away, those two, the boy and the colonel, linked and inseparable caricatures from a farce that was unbelievable.

In a day or so I turned my back on the crowds that filtered down the *Promenade des Anglais* like

bright bits of paper stirred by an idle wind, on the soft, wailing violins that languished through the light-spotted dusk of the gardens, took the train for St. Raphael, and from there set out by the narrow-gauge that clings to the tall, wooded hill-sides of the coast, dips down to the bright sea beach, and winds on along the coastal plain towards Hyéres. I got off at La Lavandou, took the road that leads up to Bormes, spilling down over the blue hill-side in a cluster of mimosa. I lay out on the high rocks in the sunshine. The valley was below me and the sea. I wanted to think of nothing, nothing, except perhaps how little I had really seen and suffered. Life was the supreme thing after all, the great good, the gift poured out on the earth from a chalice of gold. Only in the sunshine was there healing. My life had been wrenched violently from its old moorings in the last eighteen months, and now I saw that this, too, was good. My own house of cards had come tumbling. . . .

From my rock that jutted out from a spur of the hills, the wooded valleys fell away to the plain, sprinkled with whitewashed houses set in the straight margins of the vineyards. The low, dark coastal hills crouched at the valley's mouth as if guarding its garden brightness from the world be-

yond, and the distant islands, faint with their hazes, crouched brooding over the sea.

When I walked down to my hotel in the dusty, light-drenched square, a letter from the doctor was waiting for me. It was brief. Its tone was sombrely triumphant. "Just as I told you from the beginning." The boy had vanished, into thin air, it seemed, taking his cultivated "friend" with him. There had been some kind of a nasty mix-up, and everyone had a different version of it. Some said that the boy and the colonel had had a fist-fight. This, he considered, absurd. Others had it that the colonel had ordered the lady run out of the area as an example to all and sundry who misunderstood the implications of the fraternizing order. Major O'Connor, inspired to jocularity on such occasions, insisted that he was keeping her in the cellar of his billet and fattening her up on ground glass so that he could serve her up at the regimental banquet to be held in honour of the boy's abrupt departure.

All that he could state positively from his own observation was that the colonel had shut himself in at headquarters with half a dozen bottles, and had slammed the door on the adjutant's face when he had brought in the brigade order reassigning the billets within the regimental area.

There was nothing that I could do about it. . . . When I returned, Spring had already paid the Rhineland a visit and slipped out again like an unbidden guest. The black mould of the ploughed hills appeared through a faint mist of green and growing things, and the air was alive with rumours of a speedy return to America. The supporting divisions had been withdrawn from the Moselle valley, the corps were being skeletonized, and the outposts had already been drawn in. Enrolments for the small permanent occupation force were in order, and in the general stir that prevailed, the boy and his miseries appeared to have been temporarily lost sight of. . . .

I felt weariness and a kind of nostalgia for the first time that night of my return—nostalgia for the blue sea, the white beaches, the dry, preoccupied murmur of the sea-breeze through the palms. The perfume of those pale, still evenings kept coming back to me as I breathed the coal gas and stale tobacco smoke of our mean little orderly room, thumbing through the vast accumulation of papers that had come in during my absence. General Orders on neatly stencilled sheets; division orders on shorter sheets, also stencilled, regimental orders on greasy flimsy, battalion memos battered out by

wretched typewriters on square stubs of paper. A ghastly mess of ink and nonsense. The young clerk across from me at the plain plank table rubbed his nose with inky fingers, gazed at me with humble, watery eyes and went on scratching with a pen that sputtered ink over the feed-reports he was checking. The door opened and closed on the drafty tile hallway, and figures in overcoats like so many brown paper funnels pressed down over their heads passed in and out, trailing odours of manure from the streets and boiling cabbage from the kitchen across the hall. From the highway back of the village came the intermittent jarring thud of heavy truck wheels, and a motor-cycle engine idled briskly, like a loud sewing-machine, across the street. The first sergeant stamped in heavily, set his mess-kit in a wooden rack on the wall, rubbed his finger around under his coat collar, and stood with his arms akimbo, staring down at me. 'Well, the captin' was back. . . .' I glanced up at him and scowled. He grinned, sighed, picked up a bunch of illustrated magazines with the covers torn off from a neat heap by the clerk's elbow, dropped into a chair and elevated his feet, one after another, to the iron guard of the stove. The clerk shoved some papers over toward me and I was jolted back

into a remembrance of the boy and his troubles.

He had been picked up on the fourth day of his absence by the Military Police in Coblenz, a bundle of quivering excitement, trying to smuggle himself, without papers, on a train for Paris. He had forged, or was said to have forged, some kind of a document, bearing an official stamp, with sufficient resemblance to a travel order to make it almost plausible. What had inevitably drawn attention to him was his generally haggard condition and a torn and mud-stained uniform. The German lady had, of course, disappeared entirely from the scene. The boy had been brought back to the regiment, under arrest, in a condition amounting to collapse, and had been sent over to my battery, confined to quarters, under guard, awaiting further disposition of the case. It was the worst possible "disposition of the case" that could be imagined. He was to be kept under close arrest. And the collection of papers before me contained a typewritten memo to the effect that I was accountable for him.

It was a bleak cell of a room to which he was confined, and it opened on a corridor, directly across from mine, on the second floor of the

dingy inn where I had been billeted since the occupation began. The corridor gave on a pair of outside steps, and it was on the platform of these steps, under a low shelter, like the roof of a pent-house, that his guard was stationed. The room itself had a low ceiling, whitewashed walls and a wax statuette of the Virgin in a blue flowing robe and gilt crown in a niche in one corner. There were two dormer windows through which you might have reached out an arm and almost touched the projecting gables of the house across the street. The floor was bare, and a battered double bed, of solid oak covered with a dirty feather quilt, left room for an old chair or two with broken bottoms, a chest of drawers and a washstand with a cracked and dirty mirror. I could measure the length of that room by his pacing, night after night. He took little running footsteps, five from the door to the windows, then two across to the chest of drawers, and then five in a curious little scamper back to the door again. The regularity of those footfalls, after awhile, was appalling. It was like the tortured movement of some insane little animal in a cage. But what surprised and alarmed me most was his silence after the first outburst he had saved for my arrival.

Some determination had fixed itself in his mind,

and I could neither grasp it, shake it or even perceive quite what it was. On one thing he was clear: He had rescued his lady from the clutches of a "fiend." He had played out his knight-errantry to the end. He was a sacrifice to his own sense of chivalry. He had smuggled her on to a train for Leipzig. She had wanted him to come but something "had intervened." He must return, must face Colonel Sanderson—for one purpose only, that of dispatching this fiend to the underworld where he belonged.

I gasped. I hadn't the faintest notion that he would attempt to carry out his threat. He was too weakened physically, and his mind was wandering. He spoke like a fever patient in a delirium. He had wandered from a dream of life into a nightmare, and the darkness had settled around him. His papers, his poems, his "talisman," his most intimate thoughts and possessions had been exposed to the stare of a spectre. There was only one way out. He kept repeating it, his weak hands tugging and twitching at the dusty blankets. He must kill Colonel Sanderson.

I said "nonsense," or something equally out of place and futile. His eyes mirroring the hard black surfaces of his fear, stared and glittered on me.

He hinted at awful things, nameless fears, and there was an utter wildness in his apprehension of the future. He was dishonoured, disgraced. He insisted at all costs on a dignified and suitable phrasing in which to frame his tragedy. He was the victim of a malicious and fiendish persecution, not by men, but by devils, by legions of them, headed by a creature with the death-mask face and protruding eyes of Colonel Sanderson. He murmured something about 'doing well under all circumstances.' "Even yet—even yet."

I hardly recognized him, lying on the disorder of his tumbled bed in that room littered with cigarette butts and reeking with the odour of damp clothes and stale tobacco. The windows were tight-closed and he shivered and moaned when I attempted to let a little fresh air in on the scene of his nocturnal prowlings. The last spark of humour, of composure, of pride had gone out of his face. Only the mask of a curious sensitive vanity remained. He reached up for my hand, the large tears of self-pity rolled down his face; he clapped one hand to his forehead like a tragic clown making an important gesture. He must kill Colonel Sanderson! He had wandered like a lost child in a nightmare, and this was the extraordinary convic-

tion he had stumbled upon. Everything that was left to him of his phrases and noble ideals—everything; chivalry, ideals, decency demanded that he put an end to this phantom.

I tried harshness, and then persuasion. I don't believe he listened to me. He wanted to know what "they" were going to do with him; "they" who had laid their heads together, whispering and conspiring against him.

"You're going to get up and out of this," I said.

He shook his head solemnly on the dirty pillow. "Oh, no."

"Your mother"—I began, and checked myself. He turned and gazed up at me with a curious dark intensity. A rigidness had come over him, lying on the bed, as if the mention of that name had frozen him. His voice came to me through the deepening twilight of the little room, husky, small, frightened, like a whisper from beyond the tomb.

"Oh no," he said. "Oh no."

I gazed at him, waiting for him to go on, waiting for that curious mood of horror to break, to pass away, to leave behind some shadowy reminder of the smiling, eager, enthusiastic boy whose death in life I had been watching these long six months of war. He seemed to be listening, lying there, strain-

ing, listening, to some voice, within or without, that I had no ears for; to some voice more powerful than all the voices of advice, admonition, retribution, which he must have heard so vaguely these last months above the noise of his own inner outcries. Some voice that alone had the power of passing judgment on him. He had drawn away from me completely in a curious, hushed detachment that brought his gaze to the one pale fragment of the evening sky framed by the square of his little window and the uneven line of the black house-roofs opposite. He looked up at me finally, with no spark of recognition in his eyes, like one who has come back from a long journey to find that familiar things have changed, and his voice, pathetic as a child's, reached me again through the silence of the little chamber, still dwelling on that phrase, that hint of rescue and comfort, that I had never even finished.

"Not now—not ever, ever, ever . . ."

I never got to the bottom of it. I never wanted to. I watched him, while the cold winds of March passed blustering through the silent hallways and corridors of the forest, blowing ragged snow flurries, and short quick bursts of sunshine out over

the fields and the valleys, and April came in with a week of cold and bitter rain. The bustle that the rumour of our withdrawal had brought, succeeded to the silence of an indifferent lethargy as days went by bringing us no definite confirmation of our hopes. And the paralysis that had lain on the land all Winter seemed to lighten a little with the coming of Spring.

In the big towns and little towns the store windows that had shown their shutters, like cold shoulders to the passers-by, began to brighten up a bit, and a thriving business was done in Iron Crosses of the first and second class and in Mauser automatic pistols. But the food blockade, that strangest of all devices for bringing the shock of war home to a civilian population, was still in force in the interior, and the toothless burgomeister filled my ears with grisly tales of woe. In one large town not far from us the schools had been closed because the children had been too weak to walk to them, and then promptly reopened when it was found that empty minds only added to the woes of empty stomachs. In the meantime a new class had sprung up overnight, the profiteers, and the merry dance of easy money was being continued on the skeleton ribs of a waste and starving civilization. It was not

within the limited wisdom of any of us at the time to see that these things were the inevitable aftermaths of a four years' desperate futility. In the halls of diplomacy the pot went on calling the kettle black with a reiteration that was appalling, and with a flow of oratory and an appearance of efficiency that was stunning. And I had not changed my opinion about war, even though I was for the moment stunned by the testimonies of its futility. The world had broken faith with its young lives, with its dead, but that was part and parcel of the illusion of the young everywhere, the illusion whereby they made the dawning years of existence consequential and important and conceived of their gestures as witnesses to some great and universal purpose. After all the race proceeded on facts and not on illusions, on its stomach and not on its head, and under their shirt collars and ties these facts were stark and savage, or simple and strong, according as one's eyes and disposition were directed toward them. Prophets and voices in the wilderness were whipping up the cauldrons of intellectual revolt with the glass rods of their forebodings; but the only sure thing about intellectual revolt was that it didn't amount to much anyway. When I carried such thoughts to Cromer he rubbed

his nose and spat out one word: "Nihilist." I said, 'not at all'. I was no more a Nihilist than he was. There were too many people in the world running around minding each other's business, that was all. Our business in life was probably, as Epicurus had observed, to heal ourselves. I wasn't quite of the opinion that the war had been staged as a spectacle from which to draw a moral lesson, but it certainly was a slap in the face for the busybodies . . .

And in the meantime the boy's "investigation" dragged on and gave us all something to whisper about and fight shy of. There was nothing to be done for him. The colonel appeared in the background of those scenes, but always silently, unobtrusively, as a shadow appears on a screen. There was no use in hashing the thing over. Either the boy was insane and must be treated accordingly, or he must stand court martial on serious charges. There was not much choice between the two, as far as I could see; but the first had the appearance, at least, of being the more charitable. I did all I could for him and the doctor helped. I withdrew the guard that had been posted on the landing at the end of the corridor into which his room opened and put him on his honour. I might just as well have

put him on the moon. He was gone some time before dawn of the day following my incautious action, and it was up to me, of course, as the responsible party, to find him. That part of it didn't worry me particularly. He couldn't wander very far in his weakened physical condition, and I made a beeline for the forest, alone, the afternoon of the same day. When I came back he was in his room lying in a mess of blood near the window, still conscious, whimpering like a dog. He had tried to open the veins of his wrists with a pen-knife.

IX

I SAT UP UNTIL LATE THAT NIGHT IN MY OWN room, across the hall, sorting his papers, getting things in order for his removal next day to the hospital. The doctor had given him a shot in the arm, after bandaging his wrists, and he was sleeping peacefully as a child. I had the strain of his collapse on my mind; I was sickened, tortured, and weary beyond belief. I think I even envied him, lying there, tied to his bed, in case he awakened and tried to crawl out of the window. He was dreaming, and I was awake, sorting out the odds and ends of his life's remainders. His loose-leaf note-book in which he had collected his war poems to startle the world, was open on the table before

me. There were epics begun in sonorous blank verse and never finished. There were soft little speeches to his mother, imploring, unbelievably adoring, like things a child might utter in a dream that was half an awakening. They ceased abruptly on one page, and on the next were the "war poems," harsh, disorganized phrases trying to capture the full horror of those nights at the front. There were later scratchings that tumbled and spilled off the pages as his mind had slipped into darkness, down the long bleak corridor of insanity, with no doors, no doors, and no light. . . .

Cromer came in stamping, and dropped on the edge of my cot. 'Some goddam Supply Company bozos had pinched the fifth section's nose bags, and there had been a stink at the picket line you could hear clear down to Coblenz.' I growled out something or other and turned my back on him, and he stamped to his feet with celerity. 'Well, the little beggar was done for. Didn't even have the decency to finish himself off properly. Padded cell. That was where he belonged from the beginning.' I twitched in my seat violently. He stared at me for a moment, then walked out and slammed the door.

But when they took him away the next morning, the doctor's eyes behind their heavy glasses blinked

and dodged rather pitifully, I thought. A small crowd had gathered in the court of the inn, peasants, a scattering of soldiers, and on the outskirts the burgomeister with his woollen mufflers wound around him like a grey insect spun into a cocoon, his brittle old face cracked in the smile that never left it. The adjutant had driven over in his sidecar and stood beside me, pulling his moustache and muttering. I caught the glance of his eyes, shuttling up and down the street over the bobbing heads in bag-like caps, in close-wrapped black shawls, the faces, whispering, close together, joined for a moment by this break in the monotony, this catastrophe in a life that did not matter much after all, except as all life matters, serving a purpose beyond our grasp through acts and gestures not ever comprehensible. The sun had risen clear of the jumbled roofs and chimney-pots, and the wall of the forest rose from the fields, black, mysterious and glistening, like a sombre cliff walling off an unknown land. The sun-rays fell full and warm in the street; the wind that blew was soft with the promise of Spring, the dim, far-off assurance of a world made new, of a warmer, richer earth, yielding its growing things to the light. And in the eaves overhead, sparrows quarrelled noisily. . . .

The crowd had shrunk to one side of the street; a silent, mysterious shrinking. I saw the burgomeister duck his head and disappear. A figure on horseback loomed large between the plaster housewalls. The glazed eyes fixed ahead, never moved. He rode up before the ambulance, reined in, turned his head. I heard the doctor gasping. They were bringing the boy down the stairs into the court, cluttered with debris and old lumber. The cold, dead stare wandered in and out through the crowd, fixing on a face here and there; came over to me, and rested, like a touch of ice, on me. I moved quickly, as though I had been pushed from behind. The horse stirred, the housewalls seemed to move together at the turning of the street, and the man and animal were gone as though they had been flicked off a stage by the blotting of the footlights.

At the last moment the boy resisted, trembling. He had awakened from the drug in a stupor. He was convinced that his "persecutors" were going to finish him, take him to Coblenz, execute him against a stone wall, and he called out to me pleadingly, desperately as they carried him through the crowd. They pushed him in, and the door closed

on him. His white face looked out at me through an iron grill. His lips quivered. He wanted to say something and couldn't. Then he, too, was gone.

X

MAY CAME, AND STILL WE LINGERED ON IN the Rhineland. Early Summer; and the white roads lay under a film of dust that sifted out from under the rolling wheels and trampling feet and lay like a thin mist over the green fields and valleys. July passed, and the early part of August; the bridgehead arc was drawn in; we moved back to the little towns and big towns that stood on the banks of the broad, flashing river.

And then we, too, returned; and the strange rhythm of war life that had caught us up, dropped us suddenly onto solid earth again with a curious stunning impact. The earth was no longer quite the same; its people were a little different. Their

purposes were more obvious, less complex, less noble. The city was the same; its cries, its progress, its babble of tongues, of wheels and of hammers; but now shorn of meaning, they were the voices of Babel.

I had his letters and poems, but I did not read them again. He was more real to me then in those first bitter days of readjustment when much that I had believed in had ceased to be real. I forwarded them to his mother's address with a short letter, and received in reply a brief and sober note from the tutor. She was still among the living "awaiting him." Later I sent the packet of her letters he had given me with a dozen or so more that I had found in his room, unopened.

He had been afraid, at the last, to touch them. His dishonour was too great. He had fallen from the false ladder, the flimsy contrivance of ideals, they had both built together. He had fallen—with the halo she had blessed around his brow, with his little book of Shelley, with his strange little enthusiasms, his eager, girlish smile. He had gone to the war because the Germans had shelled Rheims, and for all his quivering unrealities he remained in my mind when other memories of the war's nightmares had faded. But the thought of her, alone in

that house of shadows where she had brought him up, that his spirit might grow untarnished, away from the world, was sombre. And the thought of their reunion, some day, somewhere, when he should have been brought back, I found hard, somehow, to face.

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